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The Transformative Experiences of Female Educators as a Catalyst for Social Change in the World

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THE TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE EDUCATORS AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE WORLD

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Abstract

As social justice issues become known, one may be moved to act in the hopes of alleviating the conditions that burden marginalized and oppressed people. What is sometimes missing from the discourse when discussing oppressive issues is the role women play in counteracting such subjugation. Also essential, yet missing from the research, are studies that underscore the importance of educators fostering social action change outside of and apart from institutions of learning and curriculum planning. This qualitative study examined the lives of six, nontraditional, female *educator intellectuals* whose perceptions of self (identity) and the world were transformed by engaging in social change efforts around the globe. Through narrative inquiry, a cross-case analysis of the participants revealed the Connectivity of Transformative Conditions (CTC)—situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis—illuminating our human capacity to further fracture barriers related to power, class, race, and gender through social change endeavors.

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and strength.

All of these individuals have taught me the importance of persistent questioning as a way to better understand self, others, and the world at large. Thank you for never *answering* the questions but instead, inspiring a passion within me to better understand the lived experiences of others. You have all enriched my life.

This body of work is dedicated to Amy Stewart for being my compass throughout this doctoral pursuit. I love you and I am so glad that I can count on the laughter you bring to my life every day.

I also want to thank my entire family for instilling in me the belief that what we all do matters!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> *I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.* (Lorde, 2007, p. 40)

My Experiences, My Motivation

Turning the focus inward, I have found in myself a curiosity to seek and understand what drives people to pursue social change in the world. With this wonderment has come the desire to pursue my doctoral work in such a way that I might unveil the desires, passions, and transformations of other female educators who have embarked on journeys similar to my own in the hopes of being a catalyst for social change. Over the years, my urge to be immersed in diverse cultures and meet new people often transmuted into a better understanding of my own identity, and thereby changed my perceptions of the world. My personal journey through life has taken me from an isolated, little town in Upstate New York, to places like the developing country of Thailand as a Peace Corps volunteer, to the inner city of Phoenix, Arizona as a teacher, and then the highly, affluent Chicago suburbs as a principal.

I was profoundly changed by the oppression and struggle I witnessed through the eyes of those I lived alongside of in Thailand and Arizona here in the United States. Admittedly, my challenges in life as a White, middle-class, female paled in comparison to those who were living in poverty, malnourished, or struggling with discrimination, gang violence, or human trafficking. I learned, however, to internalize some understanding of the marginalized communities in which I lived and worked in over the

years, and eventually came to grips with my own sexual identity as a gay woman. By living and working with oppressed people, I came to understand the importance of acting on behalf of the greater good; of serving with others to understand their plight and acting in hopes of bringing justice and integrity to them as valued human beings.

In the Peace Corps, I lived in a small town in Thailand called Prasat for over two years between 1998 and 2000. I walked a dusty, red, dirt road every day to get to the regional District Office where I worked with Thai educators and administrators to improve education, much like administrators here in the United States. As a certified teacher in the United States, my job as a Peace Corps volunteer was to model engaged instruction and conduct educator trainings that addressed topics such as differentiated instruction and lesson planning that promoted critical thinking. My American ideals and work ethic differed from my Thai counterparts and I had to learn the cultural nuances that redefined my work. I came to learn that to be an effective teacher-trainer did not mean imposing my values regarding education on others, but instead listening to what others' needs were and collaborating with them to seek those goals. Becoming more self-aware, I learned that social change was not a destination that could be entirely preplanned, but rather it was a process that needed to unfold while living in that place and in that time.

It would be naïve to believe that I could really experience Thailand outside of my own American frame of reference and existence. My American-ness could not be left at the door, but I did make a conscious effort to interpret the environment through the eyes of the Thai teachers who became my colleagues and friends. I could not pretend that my mere physical presence (White, blue eyes, tall, with light hair) did not provide others with an innate bias toward me as an American—sometimes good, sometimes bad. In some

moments, I was viewed as a spoiled outsider or *the Other*. This Otherness—based on my nationality, race, and at times, gender—put me at an arms length from my Thai neighbors and colleagues; I was seen as different and outside of the common culture (Greene, 1995). More times than I can count, Thai counterparts literally asked me to buy them a house or take them back to America and pay for their university tuition. I was told in no uncertain terms that I was "fat" by their standards and my light eyes were "scary like a ghost's." On other occasions, I was revered for reasons that were not totally clear to me. This treatment resembled some sort of celebrity status or fascination.

Implicit in this bias were certain advantages and disadvantages throughout my time in Thailand. It caused me to question my real motivation for becoming a Peace Corps volunteer and it shaped how I saw others in the world and how they viewed me. My lived experiences there came to be much more than a teacher trainer. Exponentially, I grew into a social change agent; finding meaning in how I was changing from the inside out. Important was the realization that through my collaborative efforts with the Thai people, they too, were feeling respected, heard, and empowered to change their own circumstances. They became more accepting of various ways to approach situations, and close friends even began to process the world outside of Thailand differently. We are all learning and transforming; seeing each other and ourselves differently.

Thailand is a beautiful and spiritual place. Rich with culture dating back to 2,500 B.C., I marveled at the temples representing the Buddhist heritage and the many artists that kept their traditions alive through the visual arts, dance, and song (Malpezzi, 2004; Phillips, 2007). My Thai colleagues, college educated as teachers and administrators, were among the few in my village of Prasat that had the opportunity to attend

postsecondary school. Recognizing the brilliance of the many craftsmen and craftswomen who wove, built homes, farmed, cooked, and sewed, still there remained an intense need to address social, health, and environmental issues that persisted throughout the country.

A myriad of challenges faced the country and led to angst among the Thai villagers I worked with closely. Joining forces with the Thai Embassy, nonprofit organizations, and local leaders, select Peace Corps volunteers such as myself had the opportunity to analyze, reflect, and brainstorm ways to address different topical issues of the time. We did not always have the answers, but we were more interested in asking the *right* questions; questions that required delving deeper into the cause of certain crisis and isolating the peripheral influences that exacerbated situations. We looked for ways to collaborate and aid in improving the circumstances at hand and improving the lives of the Thai people with the Thai people.

Environmental issues were problematic and impacted water sanitation. Air pollution hovered in the skies above Bangkok and smaller cities creating a blanket of smog. As a result of such changes in the atmosphere, respiratory problems occurred in the young and old. The illegal poaching of tigers and the cutting of teak trees near Burma led to a cooperative effort between some Peace Corps volunteers and the World Wildlife Fund to educate the locals in hopes of avoiding animal extinction and deforestation. Moreover, poverty led to health concerns regarding proper nutrition for growing children who were often underweight and had compromised immune systems. The growth of opium as a narcotic was rampant in the north—as was prostitution and sex trafficking. Peace Corps volunteers teamed together across the country to work with local village

health stations and health workers to discuss HIV and AIDS prevention in an effort to abate the spread of the disease (Phillips, 2007).

I remember sitting with a Thai colleague one evening over dinner as she pondered the virus. “I heard that if you get a cut and it does not bleed, it means you do not have AIDS,” she said nonchalantly as she sipped her beer.

Trying to suppress my fear over the very calm and sincere way she shared her misinformation, I took a breath and decided we needed to talk about the facts. HIV/AIDS education became a small part of my role while I was in Thailand, and I was grateful to have the opportunity to team up with a few nonprofit organizations on occasion to help educate and support their work. Although I was not a nurse, I learned much from the Thai nurses and the volunteers who trained me. I would like to believe that the message we shared helped to save lives, even if the message was passed along in a mere whisper to neighbors and friends.

Education was my primary responsibility for the two years and four months I lived in Thailand. At the time, Thai educators were grappling with high dropout rates, especially among rural farm children who often left school after fifth grade. The standards for education were loose and there were times when the curriculum and teacher quality I observed left me dismayed. Students were disengaged and relied mostly on rote learning, through no fault of their own. Teachers struggled to get proper materials to teach and promote critical thinking and problem solving, let alone the basic skill set needed to teach math, science, history, and language in a manner that interested students. For some children who continued their education into the secondary level and went on to

college or university, the pressure to meet their potential was so great that suicide became the chosen route (Kay, Li, Xiao, Nokkaew, Park, 2009; Phillips, 2007).

Following my lived experience in Thailand, I worked as an educator in Arizona here in the United States teaching seventh and eighth graders in the inner city and in the rural countryside outside of Phoenix. The harsh reality is that misfortune, poverty, and catastrophe does not just live outside of the United States. I remember a school I once worked at in the rural desert of Arizona where there was not one book for the students in my classroom and there was no curriculum or manual for me as the teacher. Alcoholism and poverty hung heavy over that particular town, comprised of mostly White, Native American, and Latino families. Our students were considered to be poor, leaving 99% of the students to rely on subsidized lunches. I realized here the importance of offering the students a steady and reliable teacher-figure in the classroom. I could not erase the hardships at home, but for one-hour every day I could help them forget and discover what kind of future they wanted for themselves. We laughed, we debated, and we worked hard to improve their reading and writing skills in my language arts classroom. It was only four years ago that a student from that school found me through the Internet. Nora had been searching for me for nearly ten years. She wanted to say, “Thank you,” and she swelled with pride as she told me she had become a nurse. I cried and we reminisced. She had done it. She had broken the cycle of poverty in her family.

I also taught in an inner city school in Phoenix, Arizona. In an effort to bring a novel we were reading to life, I asked my eighth grade class if they knew anyone in prison. My heart sank when every child in my class raised their hand. As we dissected the issue it became clear they not only knew someone in prison, they were related to

someone in prison. My students battled to get through middle school without being assaulted or brought into the gang lifestyle. Many of my students' parents were undocumented residents here in the United States and did not have health insurance. Imagine being a child with aches and pains that cannot be addressed by a doctor yet, you are being asked to focus on a language arts lesson. Segregation and discriminating toward African Americans, Indian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos in Arizona still persists. Immigration laws, border control, and required citizenship papers torment Latino individuals and anyone who has a complexion other than White. Modern day prejudice still subjugates citizens of the United States, despite the strides made toward indivisibility.

During night school sessions with students who had been expelled from public school, I worked tirelessly to teach middle school adolescents in an effort to bring their reading skills up to an eighth grade level. I knew the significance of reading and how it could impact their lives positively if they were to master such literary skills. I struggled watching my students balance the demands of academics and everyday life as teenagers rearing against prejudice and injustice based on race and class. A student entered late one evening with a bruised face and swollen nose.

"What happened?" I asked as I met him at the door, encouraging him to sit in the hallway for privacy.

"Naw, it's no big deal," he persisted as he dabbed a bloody nose.

"Seriously, what happened?" I asked patting his shoulder. "Can I call someone for you? Let's get some ice . . ."

"I woke up in the dumpster. Some guys jumped me and took my bag. Was in the wrong part of the neighborhood, ya' know. The freaking backpack didn't help, yo'!"

Later, the student shared more about the complexities of turf wars between the Black and Latino gangs in the city where we lived. He was a hard working kid with little support at home. Although he wanted an education, the external pressures weighed too heavily on him and soon after, he dropped out of school. These were the wake-up calls I needed to acknowledge my role in the search for social justice and awareness.

My career path as an educator ebbed into public school administrator in the south suburbs of Chicago, Illinois in 2006. Shortly thereafter, I was sought out to lead schools as a principal in affluent districts in the western suburbs and on the north shore. The north shore of Chicago is home to professional athletes and millionaires of various kinds. In those years, my school staffs and I celebrated the honor of receiving two, United States National Blue Ribbon Awards for exceptional student performance. In my heart, however, I knew our students would have succeeded in spite of us. They were steeped in a kind of capital (social and cultural) that put resources at their fingertips starting at infancy. My adventures as an educator became more of a social science *experiment* ranging from working with the rural and urban poor to the suburban upper- to middle-class and even the wealthy. In each place, obstacles resided. It was the spirit of human goodness that always crept inside of me and catapulted me to the next opportunity to find ways to give back in each context.

In the city, my students and I worked on food and clothing drives for soup kitchens and tutored one another during after-school hours. In the rural areas, we worked to clean up trash and raise funds for families in need. In the suburbs, we gathered and

delivered supplies for Hurricane Katrina victims and those devastated by the earthquakes in Haiti. We sent cards to veterans and soldiers abroad, while also writing letters to the students of Sandy Hook Elementary School after the devastating school shooting in 2012. Shoveling the driveways of the elderly, building wells in Africa, and raising awareness for pediatric cancer have all been outreach activities that helped the students and educators find purpose. For many of my students, this was the glimmer of hope they needed; these were the acts of meaning that told them that they mattered and that they too had the power to make a difference in the world. Actions speak louder than words . . . social action can change lives (Bruner, 1990).

Growing up in a homogeneous town, my encounters with discrimination did not come until I was an adult and went to college, as shared in these previous teaching and volunteer encounters. In fact, our farm town in New York was so small that as a community, the belief that everyone should be treated equally was never truly tested. There was no diversity there, which allowed many of us to live as if the rest of the world hummed the same *Let There Be Peace on Earth* tune, as if bigotry was a thing of the past. Looking back now, I am sure this unconsciously contributed to my own awareness and acceptance of being a gay woman. It was not until my mid-20s that I realized I was much more enthralled by the company of women than men. However, even once I understood that my emotions were sustained and lasting, I was terrified to identify with being gay for many years. I was afraid of coming out professionally for fear of losing my White privileges. Over time, I have been able to embrace my whole self but the threat of violence when walking down the street with my partner of 14 years still taunts me. Being a gay educator lingers in the back of my mind and I still worry about the mind-set of

parents and school board members who have conservative views on marriage and same-sex partnerships.

Being in an interracial relationship has added more complex layers to my perceptions of the world and my own personal transformation. I can see through a fog that often clouded my judgment in the past. As a witness to discrete and grotesque discrimination based on race, I marvel at the lack of human compassion at times. I can say with utter certainty that race does matter when it comes to how people are treated. For instance, in the past when I walked into a store and was greeted with a smile, offered assistance at first glance and welcomed, I thought nothing of it. I just assumed everyone was treated this way when they entered a store. Now however, I can offer example after example of walking into a department store with my partner and watching the associates ignore her, while directing a polite greeting only toward me. Astonishing, hurtful, and very real.

As I became aware of social injustices in the world through my own personal experiences, and by engaging with others who were under the duress of being marginalized, I felt an obligation to counter this oppression in some socially responsible manner. These experiences are my driving force as an educator today. They have changed the way I view myself in various worldly contexts (e.g., as a female, a sister, a partner, a friend, an educator, a leader, a learner, an American, a human). This transformation in personal awareness and awareness of others has changed—and continues to morph—to meet the contours of the various lived experiences and situations in which I find myself. Transformation is unceasing and endless. The conditions under which I meet expectations placed on myself, both internally and externally, are pivotal in

the way I have come to identify myself in different situations and how I have come to perceive the world around me. Understanding how other female educators experience this transformation, as a phenomenon while engaging in social action change, represents the basis of my dissertation work.

As author and professor Maya Angelou (1969) shared, when people know better, they do better. I believe that educators have the distinct opportunity to utilize their platform in the community at large to build critical consciousness (awareness) in the hopes that individuals will be moved to intervene in the world to solve social problems of injustice, inequity, and oppression. An educator is one who advocates with others on behalf of others. As citizens of the world become more interconnected, world problems become a collective problem for every human being (Freire, 2000; Strait & Lima, 2009). This is the beauty of the lived experience, no matter how grand or ordinary; meaning is present and can impart new ways of knowing if we take the time to let the phenomenon wash over us. A need exists, in my view, for women to step into their power and hold tight to the reigns of social action as a means of empowering others and themselves, as the next section illustrates.

Background of the Study: Women of the World

The role of change-agent, as women, can be a daunting one (Naples & Desai, 2002). Certain dynamics, such as power within a culture, sometimes are reserved for the White middle and upper class males. In many societies, whether countries of modern development or countries with limited resources, men often make the majority of the decisions and construct the world in which we live. When considering the members of *subordinate groups* around the world—those marginalized and oppressed in society—

typically, race, class, and gender are at the origin (Apple, 2013; hooks, 2010; Mohanty, 2003; Sandoval, 2000; Shor, 1992; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009; Watkins, 2001).

Congruently, other dynamics exist that contribute to the varying ways people are treated based on differences in power and privilege among and outside of these groups. Patricia Hill Collins (2013) elaborated on these complexities in, *On Intellectual Activism,* and set forth the very problems I explored in my research. Collins shared that within the framing of race, class, and gender, individuals have very distinct experiences with oppression that must be considered. To emphasize the significance of discourse related to change, Collins wrote, "Transformation involves rethinking these differences in power and privilege through dialogues among individuals from diverse groups" (Collins, 2013, p. 224).

It is crucial for society to understand that it cannot be assumed that women, for example, carry the same burdens because they share the same gender. The intricate and personal details of a woman's experience based on her gender, race, class, and locale, plays an immeasurable role in her relationships to others in the world and therefore, are worth further dissection. Here though, it is responsible to examine some statistics among women on a broad basis.

A dismal picture emerges when examining the hardships of women throughout the world. It is a distressing reality that women and girls are among the world's most impoverished inhabitants. An estimated 70% of women and girls comprise the world's poor, most of which happen to also be refugees. Considering displaced people in the third world /south (e.g., Africa, Asia, and Latin America), women and girls constitute 80% of

those without homes or those who have been forced to flee their homeland(s; Mohanty, 2003).

> Women own less than one-hundredth of the world's property, while they are the hardest hit by the effects of war, domestic violence, and religious persecution. Feminist political theorist Zillah Eisenstein says, that women do two-thirds of the world's work and earn less than one-tenth of its income. (Mohanty, 2003, p. 235)

It seems that women make the world go 'round, yet they continue to be at the bottom of the hierarchical structure that continues to support the epistemological assumptions that perpetuate the myth that they are not worthy of social, cultural, economic, or political capital (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, 2010; Ali, Coate, & Wa Goro, 2000; Anyon, et al., 2009; Mohanty, 2003; 2007; Murrell, 2007; Ornstein, 2007; Rothenberg, 2004; Sandoval, 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1990; Swarr & Nagar, 2010).

When considering women within a world context, oftentimes women are forced to live under male dominated rules and traditions; thus a link to patriarchal dominance associated with colonial rule is fortified. For instance, in a country like India where the "women produce 70-80% of all of the food," women take on the brunt of "environmental degradation and poverty" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 124). Although women are the force that sustains the country's well-being, a patriarchal system continues to decide where the financial capital is funneled and who reaps the benefits, often to the exclusion of the vary woman who labored to produce the food and maintain the economy (Ornstein, 2007; Rothenberg, 2004).

Other forces impact women and their social acceptance, freedom, health, and productivity around the world. Garth Massey (2012) noted in, *Ways of Social Change,* that "young women ages 15-24, almost one in three subSaharan Africa and one in four in South Asia are not able to read and write" (p. 133). A connection can be made between

higher literacy rates and higher utilization of contraceptives to prevent unintended births, which sometimes lead to increased poverty, disease, and death. Literacy is power in our world. Historically, higher literacy rates have proven to help marginalized individuals in Africa and Asia (especially) escape European-colonialism and control. Additionally, it has been documented that when women are empowered to earn money and be part of the economic livelihood of a nation, societies overall become more prosperous (Collins, 2013).

Consider the impact that lived experience has on a woman, her identity, and perceptions of the world. Whether she is a woman of privilege, a woman considered to be noticed yet barely heard, or a woman living on the fringes of society struggling to exercise her liberties as a human being—all of which have stories that constitute their reality. In an effort to establish what it means to be a woman in today's world and in the context of my research, I will explore the implication of the word *woman*. Additionally, the term *third world* will be examined to ensure a common understanding for the purpose of my work, since it is contested in academia and the social sciences at times (Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003).

Woman: Critique and Critical Points

What it means to be a *woman* cannot be conveyed in a single definition. Who decides what the definition of a woman is? I dare say *she* is birthed of historical, literary, real and fictional references. Women, themselves, are the architects of the definition. Women represent the antithesis of all that is good, likewise, all that is bad . . . just as man himself is defined. Albeit, men are also the architects of what woman means; hence, the theory of male hegemony within many cultures (Mohanty, 2003; Rosen, 2006; Tickner &

Sjoberg, 2011). What it means to be a woman is complex and varied and can even be temporal. It has been written that being a woman has social and political implications that can encapsulate injustices driven by both the economy and the social capital rooted in privilege and marginality (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Ali et al., 2000; Naples & Desai, 2002; Pratt & Rosner, 2012). To create socially-just-feminist politics, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) suggested that it:

> would require recognizing that sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism underlie and fuel social and political institutions of rule and thus often lead to hatred of women and (supposedly justified) violence against women. The interwoven processes of sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are an integral part of our social fabric, wherever in the world we happen to be. (p. 3)

It is fair to state that sexism, racism, misogyny, and heterosexism are strongholds within the social construct of the world. Many religious, cultural, political, and educational concepts of the world were engineered by or influenced by colonial idealism (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Murrell, 2007; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Rothenberg, 2004; Sandoval, 2000).

As a reminder, many feminists concerned with transnational feminism warn against the homogenization of the third world woman. *Transnational feminine theory* (further framed in Chapter Two), maintains that women should be recognized as individuals with unique female experiences separate from one another. It is essential to avoid assuming that all third world women experience oppression in the same manner. In fact, it would be naive to assume they experience oppression at all. Overlaying a Western ideal of what equality means in third world countries is a bit arrogant and egocentric, I feel.

Discerning what *oppression* means as I use it in my work, I rely on Paula S.

Rothenberg's (2004) simple explanation, "It is the experience of being caged in" (p. 176). She puts forth a more formal definition of its root word *press*, sharing that, "Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that they jointly restrain, restrict, or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce" (Rothenberg, 2004, p. 175). As the narratives of the female educators' of my study took form, it became evident that many of them muddled through oppressive issues that in fact influenced their work (the success or failure of implementing social change). Likewise, some shared that the oppressive issues in and of themselves became the magnetic force drawing them to their work regarding social change (the wanting to assist oppressed people in need of support). Oppression (whether it was theirs or another's) was realized as the female educators of my study told it to me as the narrative of their lives.

The only means of understanding issues of oppression on the part of the female educators was to hear from the individual women, in various geographical regions, a personal account of their lived experiences and what they deemed to be oppressive at that juncture in time and space (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, 2010; Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003). It is important to understand the reference to third world women and establish its meaning in my research because some of the female educators who shared their transformation have pursued social change in these locals. A closer review of the meaning of third world will be prudent. Cautiously and sensitively bringing meaning to its use in this research has assisted in assembling responsible narratives that act as a conduit for expressing the value of the educators' experiences.

Third World: Definitions and Controversies

Literature related to global, international, or transnational issues tends to proliferate a distinction between *worlds* when referring to different geographical locations, the development status of a country, or marginalized people in assorted countries (often meaning individuals living in poverty). In an effort to flay the worlds considered in the social sciences, education, and often deconstructed in literature, the following is helpful in reaching an understanding of the various terms and how I reconciled utilizing *Western world* (referring to North America and Western Europe) and third world (emergent nations reliant on First-World nations or the geographic Southern hemisphere) in my study. Below is a listing of those worlds (followed by a discrete explanation):

- Western world (often referring to the United States and Europe; North America and Western Europe);
- First World (referring to North America and Western Europe or developed countries);
- Second World (former communist countries); or
- Third World (referring to "underdeveloped or developing nations that [are] economically disadvantaged and therefore dependent on First-World nations for financial, scientific, and technical assistance;" geographic Southern hemisphere; Naples & Desai, 2002, p. 5)

Also at odds with these terms are:

- North versus South (Northern hemisphere, developed v. Southern hemisphere, underdeveloped/developing)

- Local versus Global (grassroots, community v. global, corporate; Mohanty, 2003)
- Developed Economies/Countries v. Economies/Countries in Transition v. Developing Economies/Countries (World Economic Situation and Prospects, 2015)

Geography plays a role in situating the nation states of South and Southeast Asia, China, subSaharan Africa, South Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania into the category of the non-European third world. Even within the United States, Europe, and Australia, people considered Black, Latino, Asian American, and indigenous (individuals with historic connections to the "geographically defined Third-World") also consider themselves as people of the third world (Mohanty, 2003, p. 47). Due to such a varied approach to the topic of naming worlds, geography is often used when creating typographies such as nationality, race, and cultural origin to name a group of people (Ali et al., 2000; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Sandoval, 2000).

In *Women's Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Global Politics*, Nancy Naples and Manisha Desai (2002) share the convolution associated with such terms. They explain that the terms third world and *Postcolonial* were widely utilized by scholars of international studies in the 1980s "to describe the uneven development and inequalities among nation-states primarily located in the southern region of the globe" (Naples & Desai, 2002, p. 5). The terms Postcolonial and third world usually represent a geographical region of the world that coincides with "othering women from non-Western countries" (Naples & Desai, 2002, p. 5). At times, the conglomerate of terms is used interchangeably, while some theorists and academics carefully choose the terms to

support their philosophical stance regarding anticapitalism, anticorporate domination, and antiracism.

Naples and Desai (2002) share that women of the globe in countries often referred to as third world are considered to be "underdeveloped or developing nations that were economically disadvantaged" (p. 205). A leading figure regarding transnational feminine theory, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), thinks of feminism as it relates to women of the "One-Third" and "Two-Third Worlds" (p. 237). The use of the term One-Third World is associated with First-World/North while Two-Thirds World is associated with third world/South. Mohanty recognizes that this binary is important because it acknowledges:

> Categories based on the quality of life led by peoples and communities in both the North and the South… By focusing on quality of life as the criteria for distinguishing between social minorities and majorities, 'One-Third/Two-Thirds Worlds' draws attention to the continuities as well as the discontinuities between the haves and have-nots within the boundaries of nations and between nations and indigenous communities. This designation also highlights the fluidity and power of global forces that situate communities of people as social majorities/minorities in disparate form. 'One-Third/Two-Thirds' is a nonessentialist categorization, but it incorporates an analysis of power and agency that is crucial. Yet what it misses is a history of colonization that the terms Western/third world draw attention to. (p. 227)

The United Nations utilizes the Human Development Index (HDI), Gross National Income (GNI), and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to situate countries around the world (Human Development Reports: Human Development Index [HDI], 2014; World Economic Situation and Prospects, 2015). The HDI was "created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone" (Human Development Reports: HDI, 2014, para 1). HDI accounts for aspects of development in the areas of healthy living and longevity (25-85 years of living), education (0-18 years of education), and the standard of

living/GNI (GNI per capita between $100-75,000; Human Development Reports: HDI, 2014). I share this information primarily to reveal that the terminology utilized by the United Nations when referring to various countries is now Developed Countries, Countries in Transition, and Developing Countries (World Economic Situation and Prospects, 2015).

Again, for the purposes of this research, I rely on the terms Western world (referring to North America and Western Europe or Developed Countries) and third world (emergent nations reliant on First-World nations or the geographic Southern hemisphere or Developing Countries) to account for the female educators' battle for human rights and women's rights for inclusion and empowerment around the world (Ali et al., 2000; Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Mohanty, 2003; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Sandoval, 2000; Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience, 2014; Human Development Reports, HDI, 2014; World Economic Situation and Prospects, 2015). The participants of my research work both within the Western world and within the third world, in locales such as the United States, Australia, Chuuk the Federate States of Micronesia, Rwanda, Zambia, Cambodia, and Bhuton. I share these thoughts on what it means to be a woman to situate my own experiences as an educator. Likewise, I also outline third world as an attempt to add depth and understanding regarding the narratives of this study. As later explored in Chapter Two, the notion of being the other will further layer the women's lived experiences surrounding social change.

Statement of Problem and Rationale for the Study

As social justice issues become known, concerned people may be moved to act in the hopes of alleviating the conditions that burden marginalized and oppressed people. Individuals who are moved to act with others—on behalf of others—sometimes identify as social activists. Yet, some identify with terms such as *change agent* or *concerned citizen*. No matter the terminology, all are interested in enacting social change for a better tomorrow in the name of human rights (Collins, 2013). I am interested in how the lives of female educators are transformed by engaging in such social change around the world and how their work changes their perceptions of self and the world.

For instance in Afghanistan, little was mentioned in 2001 of the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA, founded in 1977) when the United States' then first lady, Laura Bush, tried to bring national attention to women's oppression under the Taliban (Naples & Desai, 2002). It was as if women were not making any strides on their own accord toward social justice. In some instances, it may be that the oppressors become the educators themselves; teaching new ways of knowing, being, and understanding to the participants of the study. Through my research, I highlight the actions of female educators who dedicated their lives to social change and the transformation they have come to recognize in themselves.

Also essential, yet missing from the research, are studies that underscore the importance of educators fostering social action outside of and apart from traditional schools and institutions of higher learning and curriculum planning. For example, many studies examine traditional school curriculum around service learning projects (or civic learning) focusing on the student-learner outcomes. Similarly, universities featured in the

research are often investigating diversity programs, teacher preparation programs, faculty education regarding multiculturalism or social action, courses of study offered on service learning, or the impact of service learning on adult learners (Apple & Beane, 2007; Farber, 2011; Marshall & Anderson, 2009).

There is little to be said of adult educators pursuing social action on their own accord and the transformation they undergo separate from imparting curriculum or courses of study in learning institutions. This study approaches social change from the perspective of female *educator intellectuals* and examines how social action changes an individual's perceptions of self and the world around her. Although I will later parse out the meaning of an educator intellectual, in part, an *intellectual* uses a public platform to expose issues of oppression and becomes a face for those without a voice. *Educators,* as I see them in the current world, are individuals who share knowledge with others by way of sparking critical discourse, debate, and action toward a cause (Brandes & Randall, 2011; Marcellino, 2012; Potts & Schlichting, 2011; Ollis, 2008, 2011; Reed, 2009; Schensul & Berg, 2004).

Chapter Two's literature review focuses on the transformative conditions (situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis) that blend together to affect one's identity and perceptions of the world; thereby transforming an individual in pursuit of social change (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963). Furthermore, many agree that an individual's engagement in social action can lead to a personal or social metamorphosis (Apple, 2013; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Murrell, 2007; Pinar, 1994; Shor, 1992). This research allowed me to explore the possibilities of such transformations and metamorphoses.

Research Purposes and Questions

> *We ponder, as we must, the ways there are of providing the sorts of experiences we ourselves have had: experiences that lead to transformations, that open new vistas, that allow for new ways of structuring the lived world.* (Arendt, 1968, p. 37)

The purpose of this study entailed investigating how the social action endeavors of female educators can transform their perception of self (identity) and their worldviews. I examined their experiences with social action through what I have called the *Connectivity of Transformative Conditions* (CTC). Based on the work of Paulo Freire (2000), Albert Bandura (1977, 1995), Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990), Henry Giroux (1988), Peter Murrell (2007) and others, I posited that the conditions of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis had the potential to blend together to constitute one's identity and perceptions of the world, thereby resulting in a transformation. The transformation in the way she (a) perceives herself (identity), and (b) perceives the world in which she lives will be examined. By nature of engaging in social change efforts, one is transformed (Apple, 2013; Bandura, 1995; Bruner, 1990; Counts, 1932; Freire, 2000). I believe a dependency exists between one's situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis that lead to such a transformation. Transformation can be a personal metamorphosis or a social one (Apple, 2013; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Pinar, 1994; Shor, 1992). Through the research, I have been able to investigate how these conditions align in the lives of each participant distinctly and how the affects lead to a transformation.

The Hannah Arendt quote that opened this section speaks to the unyielding power of our life experiences and the effect they may have on our individual and unique transformations as people. These experiences shape our frame of reference as we

meander through life. They give meaning to each memory and provide a basis by which we interpret the world, draw conclusions, plan, and reflect on humankind. I contend that our lived experiences also cradle our emotions, give birth to compassion, and create a spark that affords individuals the capacity to quite literally change the world we live in; thus, altering life events, the trajectory of individual lives, and the social conditions under which people live (Arendt, 1968).

The following research questions guided my study:

1. How do female educators, as intellectuals, enact social change in the world?
2. How can the lived experiences of these women transform their perceptions of self and their worldviews, as a result of engaging in social action?
3. From the Connectivity of Transformative Conditions perspective, how does transformation occur in these women's lives?

I share the history of each woman's experience to illuminate how different educators arrive at utilizing their platform to act in service of others. Critical theorist, Herbert Marcuse, summed up *experience* as, "Historicity, or the phenomenological structures whereby social reality is experienced by the individual" (cited in Bronner, 2011, p. 14). This idea that social reality is experienced by each and every one of us differently (through the subjective lens of self) represents where the breadth of my larger body of work in uncovering the transformative experiences of these educators as social change agents took root. My greatest aspiration is that my research tells the story of lives lived, lives transformed, and the actuality about what it means to engage in social action in and outside of the United States through the eyes of these female educators.

Theoretical Orientation of the Study

This study is positioned within the critical and interpretive paradigms of research in that it validates knowledge as *understanding* of individual, lived experiences within a social context (Creswell, 2013). An understanding of how transformation occurred in the lives of the participants was linked to the CTC perspective that views culture as power-laden phenomenon and research as critical and humanistic (Schensul & Berg, 2004). The CTC perspective ties in the interpretive positioning of this study as it seeks to examine the meaning of the social action efforts of female educators working to bring about social change in third world countries and within diverse areas of the United States and Australia.

The interpretive paradigm "assumes the social world is constantly being constructed through group-interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 5). The interpretive positioning of this study examined the meaning of the efforts of the female educators (e.g., the *social actors*) working to bring about social change. Deemed as change agents, and at times activists, these women played an integral part in working to reconstruct gender roles and breaking the barriers of other marginalized people (indicative of a critical paradigm).

Additionally, appreciating and understanding the issues and challenges each of these women faced "by interpreting the meaning" of their unique and individual "interactions and actions" while pursuing social action change was examined in this interpretive research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). At the heart of this study was an understanding of how the participants viewed their social action efforts to improve the

human condition of marginalized people, and how those actions transformed their perceptions of self and identity through the lens of the CTC.

The critical paradigm is evidenced in the participants' strides to "illuminate social action;" more specifically, to engage in social action (Creswell, 2013, p. 30). As the researcher works to understand the social meanings of the world (as I have through the narratives of these female educators), the critical lens came into focus. As I looked for ways to refute subjugation in my life, as a critical researcher, I have looked for signs of the same principles in the participants of this study. As the participants stepped outside of the dominant power structures in the context of their social change work, they explored ways to create allowance for counter-hegemonic thinking and learning (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Challenging the status quo and the cultural norms proved to be overwhelming at times, however.

Aligned with the critical paradigm of research is feminist theory. The aim of feminist theory is to "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" in the world (Lather, 1991, p. 71). This dedicated effort to understand how females are at times subjugated and acknowledging that cultural hegemony (control or domination within a culture) exists for some females, constitutes the essence of the feminist paradigm (Agger, 1992; Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; 2010; Ornstein, 2007; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Rosen, 2006; Rothenberg, 2004; Sandoval, 2000; Swarr & Nagar, 2010).

Feminist thinking has much to do with an individual's point of view, which is personally framed by the experiences the person has undergone throughout their life. The social group that individuals associate with "influences how they see the world" (Pratt &

Rosner, 2012, p. 9). The influential factor of group dynamics has been pivotal to the participants' perceptions of the conditions of transformation and their ability to enact change (Collins, 2013; Murrell, 2007; Naples & Desai, 2002). Regarding feminist theory, the belief that women have agency, the independence to choose freely for themselves, and the strength to deny oppressive confines was also fundamental in the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Employing a narrative research design constituted the most appropriate methodological choice for this study. The narrative approach permitted me to bring to life the experiences of the female educators. Both the theoretical lens and the research design are further elaborated on in Chapter Three.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study involves the power in giving a voice to female, educator intellectuals who are enacting social change in the world. By examining their lived experiences, I believe the narratives of these women will be pivotal to the education field and the social sciences in that their experiences have the potential to develop self-awareness in others and an awareness regarding injustices that exist in the world; and that hope can be born from both (Bruner 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Michelson, 2012; Miller, 1990). The work highlights that women can be instrumental in resisting hegemony and oppression (Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003).

All too often, the emphasis on social action as it relates to educators reverberates as a means to re-examine school curricula, course programming, and learner-outcomes. I aspire that this study shifts the focus to the educators' capacities to incite social change and the impact that their work has had on their perspective transformation, meaning

structures and points of view to empower others interested in social justice (Mezirow, 1991, 1995, 1996). Empowering others through the participants' lived experiences can have a reciprocal effect (Apple, 2010; Apple & Beane, 2007; Collins, 2013). This understanding could lead to further fractures in the barriers of class, race, and gender (Freire, 2000; Naples & Desai, 2002; Rothenberg, 2004).

This study is noteworthy in that it acknowledges female educators as *intellectuals* capable of utilizing their sense of agency and praxis to ignite social action. The women have shared their lived experiences as change agents in the hopes that the meaning mined from their narratives will have a causal reaction. Narratives can be the vehicle that elevates the education field and the social sciences by exposing the experiences of others, the lessons learned, and the journey each has undergone during transformation (Arendt, 1968; Boyd, 1991; Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Miller, 1990).

Albert Bandura (1995) wrote that this reciprocal causation, "the interplay between social and developmental trajectories" involves four distinctive characteristics of what he referenced as a "life course paradigm: human lives in relation to historical time and place, human agency, linked lives, social timing" (p. 49). I posit that these four features are paramount in creating a sense of obligation among citizens of the world to act in service of others, particularly those who are marginalized and oppressed (Counts, 1932; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988).

These features also run parallel to the CTC. By examining the connection among these conditions– situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis– transformation in the form of changed perceptions of self-identity and the world (while pursuing social change) are a significant result of this study (Bandura, 1977; Bandura &

Walters, 1963). By examining such transformation, this study has the promise to expand the education field and the social sciences by carving out a better understanding of whether such change is primarily an internal process (changing an individual's perceptions) or an external process (changing a social situation in a community).

Today's citizens of the world grapple with a variety of global issues, such as growing populations, diminishing natural resources, environmental concerns, rapidly changing technologies, and a fluctuating economy. Bandura (1995) shared that these overwhelming issues can insight a sense of "paralysis" (p. 37). The sheer magnitude of today's global issues can cause some to feel a sense of powerlessness or feel that they have no agency in solving today's problems. A person's self-efficacy can be weakened as a result. As educators, I believe we can create a sense of collective self-efficacy and give others the confidence needed to truly make a difference in the world. Through discourse and studies such as this, a critical conversation can continue to flourish and expose new avenues to give back to the world, as well as reframe how we see ourselves in the equation. We *can* make a difference. What we all do matters.

Chapters Ahead: The Transformative Experiences of Female Educators as a Catalyst for Social Change in the World

Chapter One offers a brief background regarding the plight of women around the world and their seemingly opaque role regarding social action. My goal involved sharing critical issues about what it means to be a woman and the definition of third world, since both will play an integral part in my research. The purpose of my study, to unearth how the social action endeavors of female educators transforms their perceptions of self (identity) and their worldviews related to the CTC, was delineated on a macro level. By

sharing my own personal experiences as an educator and the significance of the study, I hope the depth of my passion toward social action radiates from these pages. Scratching the surface of my theoretical orientation, the essence of my research paradigm is both critical and interpretive, seeking to make meaning of the social change efforts of female educators by way of a narrative approach and applying feminist theory. Methodology will aptly be discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapter Two, a literature review, takes a more exhaustive look at utilizing narrative to tell a story as a means to create meaning. Transformation and habitus are the foundation of the CTC that I wish to explore. Looking at lived experiences from the perspective of the Other will be acknowledged as a possibility, seeing that most of the research participants have or are pursuing social change within communities outside of their own class, race, and/or culture. Examining culture and power lends itself to considering the *educator as an intellectual*. Recognizing that the definition of educator moves beyond the traditional idea of a teacher in a school or classroom allows for the female educators of my study to impart their experiences as individuals who share knowledge from a multitude of platforms, such as from an Illinois university to the African countryside or the Himalayan mountainside in Bhutan.

Chapter Two analyzes educators as a catalyst for social change and the parallels to activism to make the supposition that once an individual knows that a need exists, he or she should make an effort to fulfill that need. In addition, the obligation to engage in social action and the impact that such work can have on one's identity and position in the world will be described. Educators as a catalyst for social change paired with activism or *acting* will reflect this notion of obligation. The influence that positionality and

situationality have on identity are also investigated. Respecting that all participants are female, the evolution of feminist theory is applied to unveil an array of conjoined yet distinct vantage points to explore what is known as transnational feminine theory.

Chapter Three dives deeply into the methodologies of utilizing a narrative research design while applying a critical and interpretive paradigm to feminist theory. In addition, it highlights participant selection and the sprawling sites where the female educators' strides toward social change take place. Predicted data sources and data analysis methods for interpreting the research will be explained, as will ethics and my midpoint reflections as researcher.

Rather than moving straight into findings and themes, Chapter Four wanders into the very personal portraits of each female educator. Their storied lives disperse across the pages in a way that the reader will feel akin to every woman—some stories are sad, others inspirational but all are very, very true. From childhood to womanhood, how these educators see themselves and the world around them, as well as their engagement with social change and their transformations, are exposed.

Through data analysis, recursive patterns in the research, outliers, and themes culminate in Chapter Five. Here, the traditional approach to sifting through the qualitative data (e.g., audio recordings of interviews, transcripts, and coding data) all comes together. It outlines the demographics of the participants and provides an analysis of the data. Many of the themes were anticipated though realized differently by each woman. Emergent themes, such as lessons learned, the influence of religion, and ideals of *nurturer* yoked to gender were unanticipated. The convergence of situationality,

positionality, self-efficacy, praxis, and agency surfaced in the lives of each woman forming again and again her perceptions of self and the world.

Chapter Six underscores the significance of the findings and themes in the previous chapter to forge links as to *why* the findings are important to the education field and the social sciences. Here, the findings related to what it means to be an educator and what it means to transform are considered in ways that are parallel and incongruent to the literature. The crossroads between power, culture, and feminist thinking embedded within the experiences of the female educator intellectuals bring practical meaning to the implications of this study. In closing, Chapter Six suggests further study of the topic of the transformative experiences of female educators as a catalyst for social change in the world and entails my own concluding thoughts. Let us now turn to the various writings and ideas that have inspired and grounded this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

> *I find myself moving from discovery to discovery; I find myself revising, and now and then renewing, the terms of my life.* (Greene, 1995, pp. 4-5)

This chapter represents a constellation of the initial themes and research that emerged while framing my research. More specifically, this literature review creates a space for the reader to interact with the assertions I have set forth and draw their own conclusions, as they relate to their own life experiences. It is my hope that the reader will embrace the allowance to question or challenge the assumptions I offer. Stimulating thought and debate while synthesizing the various readings will "serve as evidence for the arguments and assertions" that will be made throughout my study (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 21). This conversation with the text (between reader and writer) supports hermeneutics in that in interpreting the writing "human freedom" is known (Short, 1991, p. 189). As each topic is shared, let it be that each reader feels free to ponder the significance of the matter and reflect on it with an openness that speaks to social inquiry and the human condition they call their own (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006; Van Manen, 1990).

Narrative: Stories that Matter

As I began crafting the narratives of the lived experiences of the women of my research, it was the respect paid to each individual's personal understanding of the culture in which they worked and lived, paired with their perceptions of self and the world at

large, that gave way to meaning. Henry Giroux (1988) defined culture as "the ways in which human beings make sense of their lives, feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and the wider society" (p. 95). As shared previously, it is the experiences we all live through that quite literally form our feelings and perceptions about self and others, thus creating our identity in the world (Arendt, 1958; Bruner, 1990, 2002; Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Habermas, 1971; Miller, 1990; White, 1987). Both Charles Taylor (1989) and Maxine Greene (1995) view narrative as a quest for understanding our lives. Greene elaborated further by proposing that this quest is "for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share" (1995, p. 1). In my view, this speaks directly to social action and the educators' aim to improve society for all.

In uncovering self through telling the stories of one's life, one discovers his or her identity. Narratives give way to self-discovery and "human selfhood" (Michelson, 2012, p. 200). However, if we see ourselves as constantly evolving over time, it is only within reason to agree also that identity can be multifaceted and evolving (Greene, 1995). As the narratives of our lives change throughout history so do we. "Even though we are on a common ground, we have different locations on that ground, and each one sees or hears from a different position" (Hannah Arendt as cited by Greene, 1995, p. 156). Here, the notion of transformation is affirmed, as is the continuous and enduring nature of transformation.

Lived Experience as Narrative

It has been said that when one reflects on her lived experiences, she comes to know and understand herself in a new light. When we contemplate our path in life—the decisions we have made and the actions we have taken—a window opens to who we are

and how we place ourselves in the world. In other words, by way of sharing one's lived experience, a person's identity is reaffirmed. It is in this process of reliving the moments that shape who we are that we better understand ourselves (Arendt, 1958; Bruner, 1990, 2002; Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Elana Michelson (2012) examined the impact that narratives can have on an individual's identity by stating that the fundamental roots of selfhood are embedded in storytelling:

> The narrative turn in the humanities and social sciences has been both cause and effect of new ways of conceptualizing human selfhood. Rather than seeing people as having unmediated access to experience that they then use language to convey, narrative analysis across multiple disciplines looks at how people tell stories of themselves and how they construct identities in and through the process of telling those stories. (p. 200)

Michelson goes on to write that, "Narratives—in both the writing and the reading—are not responses to society but, rather, social practices within it, practices that impose a particular conception of society and a particular way of constituting the self" (2012, p. 203). As I interacted with the female educators of my study, it was interesting to unveil the interplay between how their perceptions of self have been constructed by society and how in turn, the experience of their social actions have shaped their worldviews and possibly transformed their perceptions of self. The beauty in discovering *self* through narratives and storytelling is that we also discover Others. History bleeds into our every experience, consequently, becoming trifold: past, present, and the future (Bruner, 1990, 2002; Giroux, 1988; Habermas, 1971; Miller, 1990; White, 1987).

How individuals share and interpret experiences varies. For instance, I grew up the oldest in a household of five girls. Each of my sisters and I can retell a story of a memorable experience that we all shared but the meaning and details vary. We are not

setting out to change the events we lived, nor have an agenda to achieve by puzzling together the details in a unique fashion. However, each lived experience is distinct and separate. Each narrative manifests a special meaning to the storyteller herself. Jacques Derrida, French poststructuralist, explained this phenomenon as *différance*. The meaning of chosen words to tell about an experience is relevant and significant to the person using them at that particular juncture in time (as cited in Sim & Van Loon, 2001).

Furthering this idea of différance is the concept of seeing one's self as actually changing at various times in one's life. The culmination of such experiences gives way to every individual's life course. According to Arendt (1968) "We are different at different moments of our lives . . . Viewed as open possibilities each time we come to them, they will begin to appear as events in the ongoing human career, not objects or sediments or things" (p. 36). Hannah Arendt (1968) aptly conveyed the temporal sheath that encases experiences cradled within any narrative. Jerome Bruner (1990) similarly expressed that narratives are comprised of life events. How people integrate themselves into those events create a meaning "all their own" (Bruner, 1990, p. 43). As narratives convey the meaning of a person's lived experience, it becomes imperative to acknowledge and understand how those experiences can transform an individual.

Connectivity of Transformative Conditions

trans·form *(verb) \tran(t)s-form\: to change (something) completely and usually in a good way.*

transitive *(verb)*

1 a: to change in composition or structure.
b: to change the outward form or appearance of.
c: to change in character or condition: convert.

(Merriam-Webster: An Encyclopedia Britannica Company, 2014)

As a woman, an educator, and learner, I can trace the lineage of my own transformation over the years by connecting the proverbial dots that link each significant experience to the next. By way of reflecting upon these moments and by virtue of internalizing both my conscious and unconscious reactions to those circumstances, the entirety of my whole being—self—has undergone a change; a transformation. When considering transformation, many think of synonyms such as metamorphosis, conversion, revolution, or alteration. Robert Boyd (1989, 1991) imparted in his writing that transformation entails a lifelong, inward voyage of understanding through reflection. Transformation, he claims, is "a fundamental change in one's personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration" (1989, p. 459). This self-actualization would support the possible changes the female educators who engage in praxis (action and reflection) might undergo and how it could change an individual's perceptions of self and the world.

Applied to my research, transformation can also be likened to William Pinar's (1994) thoughts declaring that transformation comes from "dissolving frozen structures" in society (p. 66). To interpret his thinking, Pinar recognized that critique of education and society can only be realized through transforming external structures, in turn redefining one's own thinking. I suggest that transformation then, can apply to the educators of my research in how they see themselves in the world as being temporal and changing. Self is evolving, transforming, always. This transformation can be a personal metamorphosis or a social one (Apple, 2013; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Mohanty, 2003; Shor, 1992).

> Paulo Freire (2000) shared the following in, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:
>
> People develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 83)

Again, to resist the concept that reality is static or frozen gives way to the acceptance that people, time, and places are transcendent and transformational. Our very being and perceptions of self and the world around us changes continuously. I wage that those who engage in social change and dedicate their efforts to bettering society undergo a very deep and personal transformation.

In relation to the female educators of my research and their endeavors resulting in praxis, "thinking of knowledge as praxis, of knowledge as embodying the very seeds of transformation and change" can open spaces that enable women to understand the world differently (Mohanty, 2003, p. 195). Michelson (2012) upholds that transformation "is initiated by a change in consciousness and [is] achievable through one's own efforts" (p. 205). Figure 1 illustrates the connectivity among the key elements explored in this research to understand better, how transformation affects one's self-identity and perceptions of the world after engaging in social action.

Figure 1. Connectivity of transformative conditions (CTC).

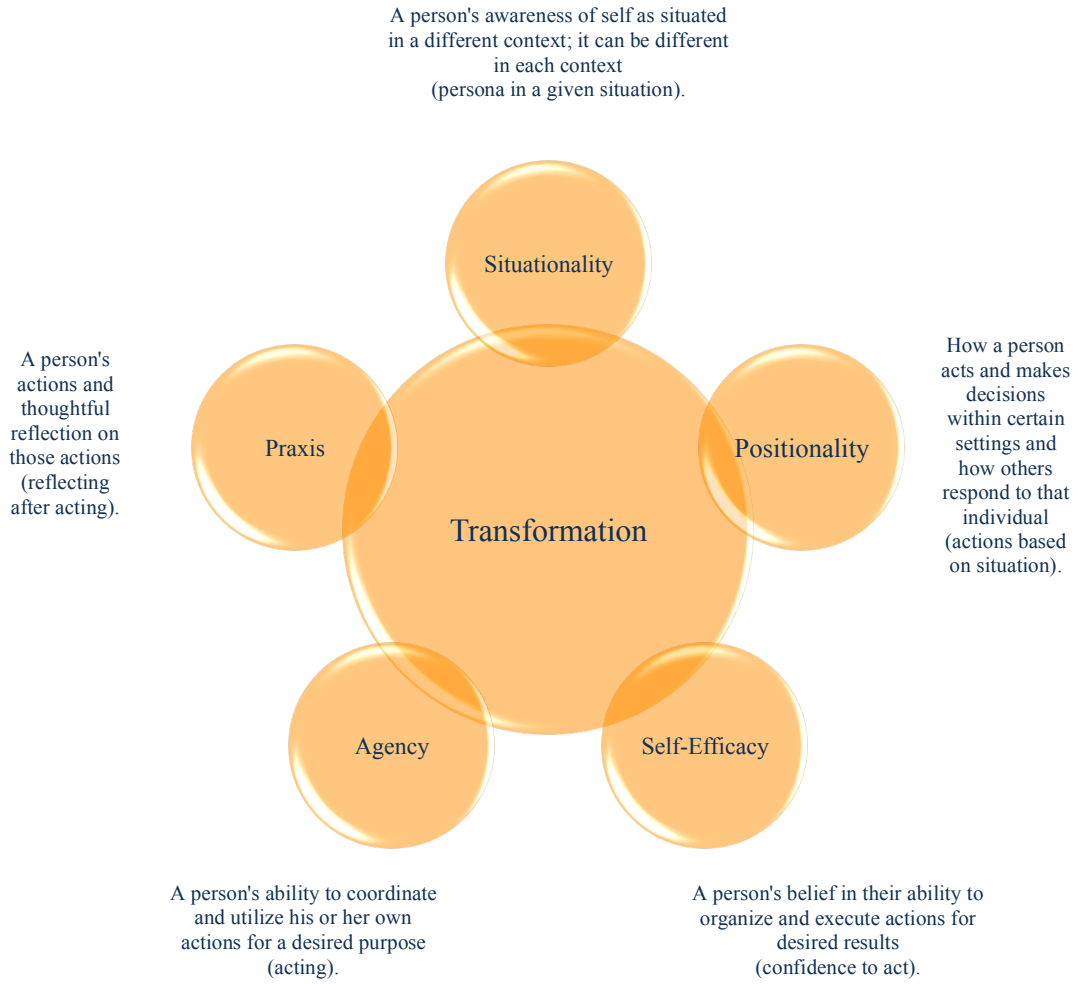

Figure 1. Transformative conditions blend together to constitute one's identity and perceptions of the world: situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis. Transformation can be a personal metamorphosis or a social one (Apple, 2013; Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Murrell, 2007; Pinar, 1994; Shor, 1992).

Supported by much of Albert Bandura and Walter's (1963) and Bandura's (1977) work, the term *personal agency* can be described as one's ability to coordinate and utilize his or her own actions for a desired purpose. When considering the transformation of the female educators, it will encompass that ability to harness purpose into action. As the coordination of efforts (i.e., agency), turned into social action and reflection (i.e., praxis), it was found that transformation of self and worldviews also occurred. Ira Shor (1992)

and Henry Giroux (1988) speak to change-agency, meaning that both learning and social action result in what they call a democratic transformation of the self and greater society. Michael Apple (2013) stressed that on a larger scale, *social transformation* is sought through amassing common interests "where joint struggles can be engaged" and a common "understanding of how exploitation and domination operate in daily life" can be shared (p. 13). I raise this point to honor the context in which the female educators have grown up as children, the geopolitical locations in which they have worked to enact social change, and the dynamics of the culture from which they are part of and that of which they entered to seek social change. For instance, some of the women in my research undertook the challenge of working in countries in Africa, another in Bhutan, while others pursued work in the Federate States of Micronesia and here in the United States (e.g., New York City and Washington, D.C.). Just as I attempted to enact social change as a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand in my early- to mid-20s, the melding of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis converged within me. Conspiring, as it were, to transform me from the inside out; changing my views of self (moving from naïve and hopeful to understanding and empowered) and changing my views of the world (from small and accepting to large and complex).

Perspective Transformation and Meaning Structures

It would be irresponsible to not include the work of sociologist, Jack Mezirow (1991, 1995, 1996, 1997) and adult education expert, Patricia Cranton (1994, 1996) in the discourse around transformative learning. Traditional educators and sociologists translate *Transformational Learning Theory* to mean revising one's meaning structures, as built over time and influenced by culture and conjecture, to become something anew or

altered. Although I will approach transformation as a natural change-process experienced by adults (as opposed to a specific learning-process), the altered or transformed frame of reference that both Mezirow and Cranton examine is very pertinent.

Cranton (1994, 1996) and Mezirow (1991, 1995, 1996, 1997) suggest that our life experiences collect within us in the form of associations, feelings, concepts, values, and conditioned responses. Together, those aspects come to be a *person's frame of reference* constituting one's perceptions of self and the world. Mezirow (1991, 1997) applied *habits of mind* and *point of view* as the primary sources in creating one's frame of reference. He noted that, "*habits of mind* are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of cultural, political, social, educational, and economic codes" (Mezirow, 1997, pp. 5-6). These habits of mind turn to expression and are communicated through one's point of view (perspective). Mezirow (1997) continued that point of view is "the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feelings that shape a particular interpretation," (pp. 5-6). As the female educators of my work offered their lived experiences, it was important to understand that their habits of mind and points of view texturized each narrative. Hence, building upon the idea that context and history signifies the match that lights the fire of true transformation. Without these two dimensions of context and history (place and time), all facets of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis are adrift and unanchored to reality. How can a person understand their identity, or the world, if the person has no comprehension of where he or she came from, and the cultural norms and power structures that are at play? Perhaps, this would actually be the purest way of knowing.

As I moved forward in seeking what transformation means to the educator intellectuals I worked with, it helped to shift the emphasis to *perspective transformation*. According to Mezirow (1991):

> Perspective transformation explains the process of how adults revise their meaning structures. Meaning structures act as culturally defined frames of reference that are inclusive of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Meaning schemes, the smaller components, are made up of specific beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience. (pp. 5-6)

Higher levels of self-awareness and transformation come from such *meaning perspective*. In other words, meaning perspective represents how an individual conceptually sifts though lived experiences to coordinate and establish meaning. A transformed meaning perspective represents the result of a revised or new meaning structure, referred to as the, *Theory of Perspective Transformation,* according to Mezirow (1996, 1997).

Transformation: Habitus

Looking more closely at what it means to transform based on habitus, I draw parallels to my own lived experiences and the transformative, social action experiences of others through a narrative lens. This unearths the value of recognizing female educators as intellectuals and considers how the work of these educators impacts their perceptions of self-identity and their worldviews to better understand if indeed social action changes a person from the inside out, and if so, how? Do we become more understanding of our surroundings and our own internal thoughts and emotions? Do we become disheartened or inspired? Do we feel we have the capacity to leave a mark on the world (to better the human condition) or are we left feeling powerless? Each woman's transformative, personal journey as a catalyst for social change reveals their struggles, triumphs, and moments of self-discovery, as a means to both inspire and inform future educators

engaging in social action.

Hannah Arendt (1968) stated that educators have the capacity to "create situations in which new experiences" can bring forth new meanings in the minds of others (p. 89). "It may be that the meanings themselves may be transformed . . . when that happens, the past itself can be remade, even as the present becomes more luminous" (Arendt, 1968, p. 89). Reading her quote, I take away the hope that educator intellectuals have the potential not only to transform personally, but to also transform others by way of reshaping the meaning of the lived experiences of others; some may be intended consequences while others may be unintended, perhaps. To serve as a reminder, educator intellectuals expose issues of oppression and become a voice *with* and *for* those who are marginalized—often shifting the social, cultural, and/or political axis of the world.

Conscious and unconscious transformation happens to all human beings. Think about the transformation you underwent while engaging in your first romantic relationship, for example. I am sure the relationship involved some very deliberate actions and planned consequences, while on the other hand, some unintended actions and consequences may have also taken place. Whatever the outcomes were of experiencing your first love, you were probably transformed as an adolescent or an adult in a way that influenced your self-identity and perceptions of love, romance, relationships, others, and the world at large.

Pierre Bourdieu (1990) refers to this social process and these realizations as our habitus. *Habitus* signifies the unconscious actions that occur and are derivative of one's beliefs and values stemming from class, family, community, and peers (Michelson, 2012). These unwritten rules and patterns of action that develop in our daily lives

comprise our habitus. Hence, these dispositions can be directly related to social structures in the world linked to gender, race, and/or class. They can be quite limiting in the lives of individuals where discrimination exists based on these edifices (Bourdieu, 1977; Mills, 2008).

The importance of establishing the idea of habitus is to exemplify the binary that can exist between a *reproductive habitus* and a *transformative habitus*. A reproductive habitus gives credence to the social limitations that culture and power place on one's ability to act in the world. A cyclical response to those limitations inhibits individuals with a reproductive habitus from realizing their full potential in the world (Bourdieu, 1990; Mills, 2008). They become trapped within the expectations that society has laid for them and resist breaking out of the status quo to reach their full destiny. For example, the cycle of poverty that exists for those with low socioeconomic status (SES) or the glass ceiling that cannot seem to be broken within the business world for minorities and females (Rosen, 2006). However, those with a transformative habitus seek ways of breaking through the barriers of any social constraints placed upon them based on gender, race, and/or class. Those with a transformative habitus believe they can literally change society by their own actions (Bourdieu, 1990; Jenkins, 2002; Mills, 2008). This attitude or mind-set calls on the belief that transformation goes far beyond self and personal agency. Transformation can be grand in scale; transformation can change the world.

Many of the female educators trying to enact social change faced challenges that extended outside of their own personal habitus. Those struggles branched out to those whom they worked alongside—marginalized and oppressed people. These marginalized counterparts carry a background steeped in a reproductive habitus that rests like a weight

on their shoulders; chastened or subjugated by years of social conditioning that holds them hostage to the way things are rather than the way things should be (Mills, 2008). If the idea of civil rights, freedom, health, safety, democracy, and voice are viewed as unobtainable, transformation of any kind will be a slow and exhaustive process, if experienced at all.

Critics of Pierre Bourdieu claimed that his construct of habitus is structurally stagnant, while opining that he sees a person as either a *have* or *have not* with little room to exercise personal agency (Harker, 1984; Jenkins, 2002; Mills, 2008). In my interpretation, however, I think it would be unfair to say that Bourdieu (1977, 1990) views human agency as impossible. Otherwise, he would have no need to recognize the transformative habitus at all. Admittedly, I do see similarities to Karl Marx's (1973) idea of fixed agency thinking at play in Bourdieu's theorizing. Bourdieu does see that people are grossly limited by the habitus they are born into or come from, just as Karl Marx saw the divide in power and culture between the proletariats and bourgeoisie class. I highlight the manifestation of habitus to help reconcile the dedicated and exhaustive efforts of the female educators whose narratives later culminate in either a reproductive habitus or a transformative habitus—either of which impacts how they view themselves as women seeking social change, their personal agency (and that of others), and their praxis in the world.

On a more personal front, the transformation of each individual woman can be situated within feminist theory by the nature of being female and their pursuit of social justice (Rosen, 2006; Tickner & Sjoberg, 2011). Given this epistemological stance, the implication is that transformation then must be both personal and societal (Ali et al.,

2000). Hannah Arendt (1968) wrote "self-reflection and critical consideration can be as liberating as they are educative. They, too, have the potentiality of opening multiple worlds" (p. 22). Something can be learned from the transformative experiences of the female participants seeking social change and how their gender may impact their experiences and perceptions of self and the world.

The Perspective of the Other

At times, we witness, observe, and engage in lived experiences from the periphery. In other words, beyond an invisible boundary that sets us apart from others closer to the experience in some way. When we are not at the center of the action or experience as a member of that distinct culture or group, we process those experiences as the Other. Our position in this particular situation or group is made different because we are different from the Others directly reconciling the experience.

The notion of Othering or being the Other surfaces in literature to acknowledge that when an individual is outside of a culture that they are examining, they most often assume the role of an outsider. Typically, to be the Other, the individual is different from the group they are within, exploring, or analyzing based on differences in "ethnicity, gender, religion, education, culture, mores, geographic location, or physical condition" (Greene, 1995, p. 4). As I share the lived experience of the women educators of my research, it will be important to give credence to this notion of being the Other as most of the women's narratives come from the standpoint of being the Other among marginalized or oppressed people.

As we root ourselves in this idea and come to know each of the participants (their background, gender, and ethnicity), their narratives take on very distinct connotations

(Mohanty, 2003). In recognizing the human condition each woman has experienced, we as readers are allowed to see into the world of another:

> Aware, then, on some level of the integrity and the coherence of what may seem to us to be a totally alien world in the person of another, we are called upon to use our imaginations to enter into that world, to discover how it looks and feels from the vantage point of the person whose world it is. That does not mean we approve it or even necessarily appreciate it. It does mean that we extend our experience sufficiently to grasp it as a human possibility. (Greene, 1995, p. 4)

As important as it is to understand each participant as the Other situated within their social action work, it becomes equally important to recognize that the individuals they are working with may also be others within their community. The plurality of this could be quite complex. As we ponder the influence that culture and power have played, surely the reality of being the Other will be prominent in the minds of the reader. Furthermore, the Other and Othering concepts will be expanded on later when deciphering the shades of hegemony linked to transnational feminine theory.

Culture and Power

Separating culture from power can be difficult. Culture in and of itself helps people to understand the meaning of their lives. Human *culture* is birthed from the meaning a group of people extract from the way they feel, the things they believe, and their actions (Apple & Beane, 2007; Shor, 1992). Positing themselves within the larger context of society, individuals assume their culture by finding purpose in all of these aspects of their lives. Culture then becomes a lived experience influenced by others. Generations inherit and shape the path of each culture as time passes.

Human beings observe, absorb, and edify culture. Individuals are not born with a belief system intact. Bias and hierarchy among citizens represents an emulsion resulting

from the teaching and dissemination of power created by people to oppress people. I stand behind the notion that without a powerFul there is no powerLess. George Counts (1932) wrote:

> On entering the world the individual is neither good nor bad; he is merely a bundle of potentialities which may be developed in manifold directions. Guidance is, therefore, not to be found in child nature, but rather in the culture of the group and the purposes of living. There can be no good individual apart from some conception of the character of the good society; and the good society is not something that is given by nature: it must be fashioned by the hand and brain of man. This process of building a good society is to a very large degree an educational process. (p. 13)

It is fair to say both positive and negative behaviors are ones to be taught and learned in any culture. At the 1959 Woods Hole Conference in Massachusetts, Jerome Bruner (1960) aptly captured the quote of an anonymous psychologist speaking about educational improvement and planning when the psychologist posed the question, “How do I know what I think until I feel what I know?” (p. 30). The symbiotic relationship between emotions and understanding converge to create a culture’s thoughts and norms (Bruner, 1990).

Thinking and knowledge literally are produced by whoever posits a belief in the purity of the proposed information. A dollar only has value because it is believed to be valuable. Power only maintains its fortitude as long as human beings continue to believe individuals most worthy in a culture or society of possessing such power exist. This represents the apex at which culture and power meet. The challenge of the female educators at the very center of my research has been parsing out the meaning of power within the society where they live or work while respecting the cultural glue that holds that community together.

Towing the line of democracy, standing up for the common good and the rights of marginalized individuals, can be a risky endeavor. Educators, theorists, and activists alike have acknowledged that it is the White middle and upper class that clutch the power to make decisions and construct the world (Apple, 2013; hooks, 2010; Mohanty, 2003; Sandoval, 2000; Shor, 1992; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009; Watkins, 2001). In the 21st century, the relevance of democracy has been questioned, but of course, primarily by the haves and not the have nots. After all, if the more affluent and dominant culture (the haves) of any society were to rally behind democracy—equal rights, freedom, and liberty for all—it may result in some sacrifice on their part; sacrifice of resources, shared wealth, and a loss of power or social capital (Apple & Beane, 2007; Murrell, 2007; Noguera, 2008; Said, 1994; Watkins, 2001).

When looking at the power structures that unfold within any culture, the before mentioned sacrifices refer to losing *capital* (benefits reaped due to association with others in power). Whether it is social capital or culture capital, the rewards are afforded only to those with power or those with social dominance (Noguera, 2003, 2008; Ornstein, 2007; Rothenberg, 2004). *Social dominance* can be described as when a dominant group surfaces and extracts a "disproportionately large share of the positive social value, or all those material symbolic things for which people strive" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1990, p. 31). I feel this scenario plays out today in the 21st century and gives rise to tensions on a political and social front for marginalized people all over the world—particularly regarding race, class, gender, religion, and sexual orientation.

I agree with George Counts (1932) in that when trying to enact democracy for the greater good—to act upon social issues that oppress people—it requires the strength of an

individual to question those with power and challenge the status quo, as not to perpetuate it. Although Counts (1932) speaks from a perspective carved from the Industrial Age in the United States, he reminds us that many people feel that education should be linked to real life, however, "at a distance or in a highly diluted form" (1932, p. 7). In other words, he expresses that people of a dominant culture (typically, Whites of the middle and upper socioeconomic classes) are not compelled to concede the benefits of their influence for fear of losing the culture or social capital afforded them based on race and class.

The challenge is that as a society, we cannot change these power structures unless we acknowledge them, confront them, and dismantle them. Counts (1932) urge people to embrace the "imposition" or obligation to seek social justice for all (p. 7). One might ask, whose job is it to do so? My convictions moved me to believe that the educator's role involves holding up a mirror and helping people acknowledge, confront, and dismantle the power structures that oppress others. I make the claim that I feel this is a shared responsibility among all citizens of the world, however. I feel that as part of my academic pursuit, it will be essential, as part of my academic pursuit, to further codify what being an educator means before attempting to understand the transformation of the females of my research, as aligned to social change endeavors (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999).

Who is an Educator?

> *Real intellectuals are never more themselves than when, moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority.* (Said, 1994, p. 6)

I wish to make the claim that an educator is an *intellectual*. In *Representation of the Intellectual*, Edward W. Said (1994) shared his insights regarding what it means. Being

an educator intellectual has little to do with academia or intelligence, as measured by I.Q. tests, and more to do with an individual's ability to question the world and speak to justice. The notion of obligation and responsibility to speak and stand up for the oppressed is cemented in the term intellectual and what it means to be an intellectual. An intellectual uses a public platform to expose issues of oppression and becomes a face for those without a voice.

Said (1994) aligns himself with the idea that people must stand up to the dominant cultures in society that holds the power and exert themselves on the oppressed to ensure their social capital remains intact. "My characterizations of the intellectual as exile and marginal, as amateur, and as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power," Said (1994) wrote as a means to exalt the view that if ordinary people speak truth to power (name the indiscretions of the powerful) justice will come to fruition (p. xvi). Articulating a message for the common good is reiterated in Said's work again and again. The role of the intellectual—the educator—involves holding standards for all human beings that reverberate the ethics of justice and freedom and speaks against the violations of such rights.

Paulo Freire (2000) detailed his thoughts on the significance of emancipation, which also spoke to being an intellectual. In, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the intellectual typically has power and dominance (much different from Said's definition of an intellectual). I juxtapose the two here to show the commonality, however, in that both Said (1994) and Freire (2000) want to acknowledge the need to empower the oppressed by being moved to act on behalf of those who have had their rights and voices squelched. Freire (2000) references problem-posing education (similar to social action learning) as a

means to praxis. *Praxis* itself is the cataclysmic result of engaging in social action and reflecting on the process and outcomes.

As problem-posing education comes into focus in Freire's (2000) work, I wish to make the assertion that an educator is an intellectual who pursues an equilibrium concerning the human condition and shares this pursuit with others by way of action and reflection, policy making, lecturing, teaching, or training. Freire (2000) stated:

> Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization. (Freire, 2000, p. 86)

As problem-posing education comes into focus in Freire's (2000) work, I wish to make the assertion that an educator is an intellectual who pursues an equilibrium concerning the human condition and shares this pursuit with others by way of action and reflection, policy making, lecturing, teaching, or training. In today's day and age, education and the role of the educator extends far beyond schools, universities, and classrooms. Current educators typify individuals who share knowledge with others by way of sparking critical discourse, debate, and action toward a cause. Their pulpit may be seen or unseen, highly contested or highly supported by the masses. The voices of these educator intellectuals may be audible through lectures, writings, trainings, policymaking, speeches, or social media. Their hands may till the soil of the earth, hold back the oppressor(s) in protest, or peacefully stand with those who feel alone in the world. Through their activism, volunteerism, and desire to serve those in need, these individuals have earned the title of

educator, in my view. These are the women I highlight in my research; these are today's educators. Such intellectuals submerge themselves in social action with the knowledge that reflection and collaboration—within a community seeking emancipation—are the overture to social change. The poetic combination of a democratic choice to seek justice on behalf of others and the transformative nature of such action has led me to my research questions (hooks, 2010; Said, 1994).

Henry Giroux (1985, 1988) also wrote about the educator as a transformational intellectual. He reflected on the role of the educator in his writing, making a clear connection between knowledge and power as it relates to fighting for democracy and declaring the educator a defender of social justice. According to Giroux (1985), "Knowledge and power are inextricably linked to the presupposition that to choose life, to recognize the necessity of improving its democratic and qualitative character for all people, is to understand the preconditions necessary to struggle for it" (1985, p. 49). Giroux (1985, 1988) considers the value of critical discourse surrounding issues of injustice and agrees with others like George Counts (1932), Paulo Freire (2000), Jean Anyon et al. (2009), bell hooks (2010), and Michael Apple (2013) in that through rich conversation and questioning the world, educators can step forward and break the normative mold. Through such discourse, people can be brought together by way of dialogue to contemplate the world and maneuver intricate tribulations. As Giroux stated, "Transformative intellectuals need to develop a discourse that unites the language of critique with the language of possibility, so that social educators recognize that they can make changes" (Giroux, 1985, p. 49). Educators are change-makers.

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critique with the language of possibility, so that social educators recognize that they can make changes" (Giroux, 1985, p. 49). Educators are change-makers.

The significance of being an educator is not in indoctrinating the thinking of individuals (child or adult), but rather to "encourage human agency" (Giroux, 1985, p. 49). In addition, educators inspire people to act and represent one of the most significant contributions in my quest to establish that educators teach for the greater good; sometimes in classrooms, in town squares, in churches, on stages, with nonprofit groups, and through policy writing, listening, and speaking. Next, educators as a catalyst for such social change will be exhumed.

Educators as a Catalyst for Change

> *Ordinary people hold the key to a better world; experience is the best guide to thinking and action; to achieve social progress people must think for themselves and reach their goals through self-activity rather than rely on outside authority to think or act for them; it is the responsibility of everyone to strive for a better world; those who are not political in this broad sense are illiterate, no matter how well they read or write.* (Ayers et al., 1998, p. 82)

In my search to unearth the soul of social action and what it means to an educator, I came across Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti's (2001) work, *Making Good Citizens.* Thoughtful questions taunted me and were raised in regards to creating schools that respond to the need for molding citizens of the world, helping students understand and respond to local and world issues, exercising democracy, and determining the ethical dilemmas that define us all as human beings. The role democracy plays in creating a backdrop for social action can be pivotal. The ability of both adults and students to exercise their voice against issues of social injustice is the starting point for which all action and change is birthed. Through my experiences in education, I have observed the

power of creating a "growth mind set" at a young age that manifests into agency as a child grows and becomes an adult (Dweck, 2008. p. 7).

Carol Dweck (2008) explained *growth mind-set* as a state of mind an individual has that is grounded in the idea that characteristics, qualities, and skills can be cultivated through the individual's own efforts. The value in this statement resides in the simple fact that as human beings, we have the power to devote our efforts into meaningful acts; we have the ability to work toward molding our very selves into an enhanced version of who we presently are. One's "true potential" can be self-actualized and realized, according to Dweck (p. 7). This implies the potential then for transformation in all of us.

As stated earlier, overcoming oppression and making a change for the betterment of a group of people acknowledges momentum built out of mere thoughts and turned to action. William Damon (2001) wrote, "Complacency is a common mechanism for success-born self-destruction in human affairs" (p. 122). At this juncture, I am reminded of our human crimes of the past: mass killings in Rwanda and Darfur, Hitler's slaughter of the Jews and others he deemed lesser than himself, the enslavement of millions of Africans, young girls deprived of their innocence and sold into sex-trafficking, and those living in poverty and dying from starvation around the world (Mohanty, 2003; Takaki, 1993, 2000). The injustices, big and small, have mounted over the years and sadly enough, most have been a result of humans creating devastation for other humans; "self-destruction in human affairs," as Damon wrote (2001, p. 122).

John Dewey (1938) posed an interesting question in, *Experience in Education,* in which he asked, "How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present?" (p. 23). The

aforementioned tragedies of the human race are ones that we have the potential to learn from in order to appreciate the conditions of the present day. As a progressive educator, Dewey (1938) strived to show the world that "genuine" education comes from experience (p. 25). The concept that democracy leads to a better quality of life-experience by affording people the option of freedom, choice, and kindness to others recognizes the very foundation of social action. This tells me, as a school administrator, that educators of all kinds can be a catalyst for social change.

Reflecting on Maxine Greene's (1995) thoughts regarding social justice, she clearly outlined the importance of recognizing factors that oppress people. Without this recognition, freedom cannot be found. Greene (1995) shared:

> Where oppression or exploitation or pollution or even pestilence is perceived as natural, as a given, there can be no freedom. Where people cannot name alternatives or imagine a better state of things, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged. (p. 50)

I urge all educators to become comfortable in identifying the social issues within the context of our culture and the world. Plainly put, we need to name the elephant in the room. It requires being courageous and discussing issues that can be challenging, difficult, and raw to uncover the oppressing factors that impede human development, the economy, politics, and world affairs. I am referring to the hidden social agenda that exacerbates issues such as racism, sexism, gender bias, and classism. These issues influence political frameworks that can stifle human capacity and the human condition (in my view), if they are not challenged through social action change (Ayers et al., 1998).

As educators, we can lay the groundwork for a heightened social consciousness. It is likely that the transformative experiences of the female educators as catalysts for social

change (in my research) will share experiences and stories that highlight an awareness to social justice issues in their early educative years (Ayers et al., 1998; Dewey, 1938). Educators as intellectuals have a platform to bring the experiences of the marginalized people of our world to others. Nevertheless, raising questions of inequality and human rights will not be enough. This is the swinging bridge we must cross. We must find a way to bring meaning to the injustices people endure and create authentic experiences that burn a path toward a lifelong commitment to learning and social action. Admittedly, politics often creates a haze that educators must feel their way through; especially for White educators who must ask themselves the question, *What is more important, White privilege or human privilege?* Social action is the impetus to human privilege (Ravitch & Viteritti, 2001).

Author of, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003), wrote that a "commitment to teaching well is a commitment to service" (p. 83). She points out that the profession of teaching is in fact a service to the world. I would agree and challenge her thinking further by saying that teaching *well* is determined by the actions our students take as they navigate the world. Most educators never really get to see this litmus test. Hooks (2003), like John Dewey (1938, 2011), shared the belief that freedom plays an important role in education. "Education as the practice of freedom," hooks (2003) claimed, offers a student the capacity to establish self-esteem, becoming ever more conscious as he or she moves through life (p. 72). "Education as the practice of freedom" and offers a student the capacity to establish self-esteem and be conscious as he or she moves through life (hooks, 2003, p. 72). Hence, freedom is this space in which one is self-aware and equally aware of others. Education as freedom enables students and

adults to recognize the struggles of others. This can be powerful in that it gives individuals the fortitude to stand up against the status quo and be moved to act in service of others. Here is where the educator, the agent of social change, is born.

Intellectuals as Activists

Catherine Marshall and Amy I. Anderson (2009) authors of, *Activist Educators: Breaking Past the Limits,* defined an *activist* as an "individual who is known for taking stands and engaging in action aimed at producing social change, possibly in conflict with institutional opponents" (p. 18). Framed by social justice epistemology, such work is embroiled in seeking equity and empowerment of "oppressed or silenced groups" (Marshal & Anderson, 2009, p. 18). With the focus on the empowerment of oppressed groups, feminist theory clearly demarcates such social action.

Activism operates on the principles of democracy, transformation of self and community, identity, agency and praxis, political resistance, and emancipatory efforts aimed at those who are marginalized. At times, activism on the part of educators is partial to enhancing the school environment where an educator might work, or it is aimed at enhancing education for students or the overall profession for teachers. However, micro-political levels of activism associated with an educator's personal passion regarding social change also exist and may fall outside of the educational system (Apple, 2010, 2013; Collins, 2013; 2011; hooks, 2010; Naples & Desai, 2002).

Traditional educators have the challenge of working within a relatively conservative system that rewards compliant behavior. Those willing to stand up for a cause—whether it be associated with education or outside of education—may be risking their professional reputation or their job (Marshall & Anderson, 2009). As George Counts

(1932) also expressed, "Any individual or group that would aspire to lead society must be ready to pay the costs of leadership: to accept responsibility, to suffer calumny, to surrender security, to risk both reputation and fortune" (p. 2). Teaching of any kind is inherently a political activity that warrants critical thinking and the problem solving capacities of all individuals involved. Educator activists must be self-reliant individuals who are willing to challenge the existing state of affairs (Counts, 1932).

Michael Apple's (2013) view in, *Can Education Change Society*, spoke to the goals of progressive groups, individuals, and educators who take a critical stance pertaining to social change and the significance of care, love, and solidarity:

> Connecting the transformative aims of multiple progressive groups so that we support each other in our efforts to 'change society'…Both a broader array of progressive and social movements and a set of core values—in particular the values of care, love, and solidarity—will play key roles. (Apple, 2013, p. 11)

On a transnational scale, various researchers acknowledge the connection between academia and social change. Regarding the work of educators who perform progressive work through activism, the idea of the intellectual comes back into play (Collins, 2013; Giroux, 1988; hooks, 2010; Mohanty, 2003; Said, 1994).

Social Action + Reflection = Praxis

> *Thinking is an action. For all aspiring intellectuals, thoughts are the laboratory where one goes to pose questions and find answers; the place where visions of theory and praxis come together. The heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—to understand how life works.* (hooks, 2010, p. 7)

For the purpose of this research and understanding *praxis*, I rely on Paulo Freire's (2000) claim that action and reflection equal praxis (p. 87). Famously quoted, he posited that human beings must "name the world" (akin to "speaking truth to power" like Edward W.

Said [1994, p. 88] wrote) and then act and reflect for the betterment of society (p. 88). Such work—action and reflection—are the inner workings of praxis, the bones of social action. Understanding the actions of others gives rise to one's own actions. This understanding may also be the very chisel required to break barriers of class and race (Freire, 2000). Learning through action or "in action" creates an interesting dynamic that not everyone can be right all of the time, as clarified by bell hooks (2010, p. 9). People need to accept differences and be malleable enough to respond to the ever-changing world around us.

Posing critical questions about the world through critical thought acknowledges the first cornerstone to action and reflection. Determining quality educators is based upon their ability to elicit critical thinking in others. In analyzing how children develop, learning to question the world represents a natural instinct. Yet, as students age, some schools in the United States have deterred such questions from being asked freely. Sadly, children's passion for thinking often ends when they encounter a world that seeks to educate them for conformity and obedience only. Most children are taught early that thinking is dangerous. Sadly, these children stop enjoying the process of thinking and start fearing the thinking mind. Whether in homes with parents who teach via a model of discipline and insinuate that it is better to choose obedience over self-awareness and self-determination or in schools where independent thinking is not acceptable behavior, most children learn to suppress the memory of thinking as a passionate, pleasurable activity (hooks, 2010). I share this early illustration of an educative experience because these are likely the seeds planted in the formative years that grow within us as we become adults.

Ira Shor (1992) pointed out that the essence of critical thought requires

challenging the boundaries of the world in which we live. Transcendental changes can occur once individuals "examine familiar situations in an unfamiliar way" (Shor, 1992, p. 93). When we allow ourselves to be exposed to social situations to deconstruct and plan for a better outcome, in an effort to seek social justice, we are given time and space to recreate the reality we once knew. Then, real engagement with an issue or people in need of a collaborative effort through social action can begin. Imagine utilizing this lens to examine the world. It would open our eyes to a world many may not have known even existed. Shor (1992) also makes the association between critical thought, democracy, and freedom by sharing that "the act of study needs to be thought of as an act of cultural democratization; democratic relations in class legitimize the critique of oppression; students [any receptive learner] experience[s] freedom while examining the forces which impede freedom" (p. 96). The key factor in critical education is teaching others to question, research, reflect, and become self-regulating.

Hooks (2010) explored in her writing the importance of teaching students to think critically. It takes time to build trust and encourage learners and educators to take risks. Posing questions that the educator may not have the answers to and analyzing social dysfunction can be uncomfortable. The gains of such exploration come in the shape of self-actualization and understanding of our *position* (i.e., identity linked to our social situation) in the world. Coming to terms with one's *situated identity* means coming to terms with reality and the social power he or she has or needs to acquire. The interactive process of critical thinking between the educator, learner, and the world helps individuals arrive at what matters most in the world—awareness. Building such a community of learning emphasizes the fact that everyone is empowered to participate in the social

change process (Bandura, 1995, 1963; Bruner, 1990, 1960; Freire, 2000; Noguera, 2008).

Obligation

Educators and activists espouse that once recognizing an injustice, an obligation exists to act. Some argue that the individual assumes a responsibility by the shear nature of such knowledge. George Counts (1932) referred to this knowing as an "imposition" because recognizing a social injustice should be the impetus to act to reconcile it (p. 9):

> I am prepared to defend the thesis that all education contains a large element of imposition, that in the very nature of the case this is inevitable, that the existence and evolution of society depend upon it, that it is consequently eminently desirable, and that the frank acceptance of this fact by the educator is a major professional obligation. I even contend that failure to do this involves the clothing of one's own deepest prejudices in the garb of universal truth and the introduction into the theory and practice of education of an element of obscurantism [small mindedness]. (Counts, 1921, pp. 9-10)

Protecting the interest of oppressed individuals or marginalized people realizes an obligation of the educator as an intellectual (Counts, 1932). Michael Apple (2010, 2013) acknowledged that schools should be utilized for social transformation. Since all children share the common experience of school, Apple and Beane (2007) wrote that schools have a "moral obligation to bring the democratic way to life in the culture and curriculum of the school . . . such a life is learned by experience" (p. 8). Society itself is preserved and redeemed, according to Counts (1932), by individuals willing to lead, despite its risks. It is a duty to act in service of others (Bruner, 1990; Dewey, 2011).

Identity and Connectivity of Transformative Conditions (CTC)

> *Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.* (Freire, 2000, p. 81)

It would be impossible to respond to any injustice, or even joyous celebration, without an individual bringing his or her own experiences to the forefront. Here, Freire (2000) reminds us that the way any individual sees the world, its horror and beauty, stems from their own position in the world. Understanding that a person's situation or position in life ultimately effects his or her interactions with others is elemental in appreciating the construct of one's identity. The degree to which a person experiences situations personally (based on class, race, gender, or other distinctions), can be essential to how a human deconstructs the world and sees him- or herself. Often, such "temporal-spatial conditions" (Freire, 2000, p. 109) or "positionality" influences these experiences due to either bias or discrimination acted upon individuals (Murrell, 2007, p. 11). An important concept to my scholarly work involves developing an understanding of identity, situationality, and positionality to provide me with a compass whereby I can navigate the complexities of the educators' experiences and worldviews. Additionally, this knowledge will further illuminate the marginalized individuals' positions, given their geographic and sociopolitical environment.

Examining the crux of positionality will be important to better understanding how context influences our actions and how we see others. All human beings unconsciously gauge the actions and perceptions of their peers and as a result, inadvertently rank and process the various positionalities that exist within each social group. *Positionality*, as described by Peter Murrell (2007), refers to how a person acts and makes decisions within certain settings and how others respond to that individual. The process by which society creates bias is based on privilege, power, and status, in relation to a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or caste. For instance, an affluence person may be

held in high regard, seen as having great potential by many people in society. As a result, this individual might experience various opportunities to grow cognitively and socially whereas a person of poverty may be seen as culturally deficient. In this instance, the person of low SES will likely have limited access to resources or opportunities, thus impeding his or her growth and impacting self-efficacy in a negative way. These examples of positionality play out in a variety of ways and invariably shape a person's identity, motivation, agency, and voice in the world (Howard, Grogan Dresser, & Dunklee, 2009).

Murrell's (2007) *situated-mediated identity* theory can be viewed as a progressive formation of one's self or identity wherein the person moves to:

> an awareness of one's positioning and positionality to agency. The first phase of developing an awareness of oneself as situated is the realization that one is a different person in different context. The second phase of developing awareness is one of realizing how one actively positions oneself in his or her interactions with others to present the desired persona to others…The third phase is agency, a critical conscious understanding of both one's situation and positionality in any given setting or context. (p. 29)

I share this point of view to emphasize that one's situationality and positionality leads to agency and praxis. Thus, an educator cannot gauge or perceive the impact that social action will have on marginalized individuals without acknowledging how they themselves are situated and positioned in the world and how those they are working with are situated and positioned in the world. I propose that the CTC blend together to constitute the transformation of self-identify of the female educators, and their perceptions of the world can be broken down into situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis (as previously illustrated in Figure 1).

Reflecting on the impact human identity carries for each female educator, it is my feeling that each female educator's self-identity presents the very lens through which she sees herself as a woman, a social action catalyst, and the world at large. All of life is subjective and flows forth from that realization of self. I would further extend that sentiment by saying that this realization of self provides a derivative of her actions in the world; the social change she brings to fruition, the shear effort exhausted toward that cause, or perhaps, even good intentions that never even take full flight. This ability to turn concepts into reality through planned and pursued action is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1995; Bandura & Walters, 1963).

Albert Bandura (1995) defines *self-efficacy* as a "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy influences how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act" (p. 2). Bandura (1977) posits that external factors influence and shape an individual's behaviors—especially that of children. I would deduct that positive and negative experiences can have a major impact on a person's self-efficacy and their personal views on how they may be able to impact the world in which they live (Pajares & Urdan, 2006). Yet, knowing one's self and understanding how that persona changes in various contexts is critical in maneuvering through the world. As a reminder, Ira Shor (1992) and Henry Giroux (1988) posited that learning and social action (change-agency) result in the transformation of self.

Figure 2 presents a helpful illustration that defines the key components of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, praxis, and transformation. These conditions help an individual to move toward transformation. Integral to this research is

how these conditions blend in the lives of the participants, and whether or not they constitute a change in their perceptions of self and the world at large after engaging in social change efforts. Can what we *do* literally change how we see others and ourselves? Can *external* actions create a churning of *internal* thoughts, ideas, emotions, beliefs, and points of view? If so, can the opposite hold true: Can the churning of *internal* thoughts, ideas, emotions, beliefs, and points of view result in an *external,* physical, or cultural change in the world? Perhaps, the ladder provides fodder for a future study.

Figure 2. Key components of connectivity of transformative conditions defined.

Condition	**Definition**
Situationality	A person's awareness of self as situated in a different context; it can be different in each context **(persona in a given situation).**
Positionality	How a person acts and makes decisions within certain settings and how others respond to that individual **(actions based on situation).**
Self-efficacy	A person's belief in their ability to organize and execute actions for desired results **(confidence to act).**
Agency	A person's ability to coordinate and utilize his or her own actions for a desired purpose **(acting).**
Praxis	A person's actions and thoughtful reflection on those actions **(reflecting after acting).**
Transformation	Personal or social metamorphosis **(a change).**

Figure 2. Key components of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, praxis, and transformation defined (Apple, 2013; Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Merriam-Webster: An Encyclopedia Britannica Company, 2014; Murrell, 2007; Pinar, 1994; Shor, 1992).

Shifting our lens now to transnational feminine theory specifically, the underpinnings of feminist theory here in the United States will first be explored. Spanning from a movement that began with a woman's right to vote, to questioning the institution of marriage and the woman's role in society linked to gender, labor rights, and the international human condition. As the social consciousness of women grew, so did

their stake in social action around the globe. Females who started to question their position and situation in the world started a movement all their own.

Evolution of Thought Toward Feminist Theory

> *When I use the words woman or feminine I evidently refer to no archetype, no changeless essence whatever; the reader must understand the phrase 'in the present state of education and custom' after most of my statements. It is not our concern here to proclaim eternal verities, but rather to describe the common basis that underlies every individual feminine existence.* (de Beauvoir, 1978, p. xxx)

In relation to lived experience as embedded within a time and place, feminist theory surfaces as the backdrop. Feminist theorists, Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner (2012), postulate, "All subjects have a standpoint constructed in part by their social grouping, that influences how they understand the world" (p. 9). I share this view to reconnect and frame that a woman's experience in context or in a specific group (her situationality and positionality), literally shapes her worldviews. Looking through the telescope aimed at feminist theory, it is logical to surmise that gender becomes the first and foremost context that any female situates herself—regardless of other social groups or her geographic location—thereby confirming that in order to understand a woman's identity and perceptions, feminist theory must be examined at the onset.

In the United States, first-wave feminist theory was grounded in the women's suffrage movement, women's rights, and gender equality in the 1800s and early 1900s. Accredited with women's suffrage and the right to vote in 1920, Susan B. Anthony is now viewed as the stimulus of the movement called the first wave of feminism or first-wave feminist theory (Rosen, 2006). This first-wave feminist theory had its roots in Marxist thinking. Conversely, many American women dismissed the association with

Karl Marx in the 1940s, expressing that Marxist views (though emancipatory at heart) were tarnished by patriarchal values that silenced the voices of women rather than liberated them. Heidi Hartman, American feminist, rejected the parallels between Marxist thinking of structural oppression sharing that sociopolitical issues and class struggles were at the center of Marx's work, not the women's struggle toward social justice (Sim & Van Loon, 2001). Other early critics claimed that feminist thinking was "un-American godless Communism that forced women to work outside of the home" (Rosen, 2006, p. 27).

Significant to establishing a modern view of feminist theory was Simone de Beauvoir, who authored the book, *The Second Sex,* in 1948. Published first in France, the book brought into question male domination and challenged society's expectation of what it meant to be a woman. This second-wave of feminism shifted its attention to gender roles and called into question the institution of marriage and childbearing as constituting the female experience (de Beauvoir, 1978). At the top of the second-wave agenda were issues related to job equality, sexuality, reproductive rights, and family roles. Martha Lear initially coined the phrase "second-wave feminism" (and used the term first-wave feminism for the first time) in her 1968 New York Times Magazine article, "The Second Feminist Wave" (Agger, 1992; Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Rosen, 2006; Rothenberg, 2004, pp. 56, 85; Sim & Van Loon, 2001).

Women's rights activists became orators and writers in order to make heard the voice of generations of women banging on the doors of equality. At the helm of such social organization related to civil rights and labor unions in the 1950s were Mildred Jeffrey, Claudia Jones, Betty Friedan, Esther Peterson, Gerda Lerner, and legions of

others (Rosen, 2006). Unfortunately, the critics of feminist theory saw supporters as sexist or in opposition to males, altogether. Feminists were often labeled as male-bashers or male-haters (Rothenberg, 2004). Other critics claimed that feminist theory could not stand alone as a theory but rather was an adaptation of cultural studies (Agger, 1992).

In the 1960s and 1970s, feminist movements lacked social awareness toward women outside of the United States. A global consciousness toward the struggles of those oppressed in other countries had not yet filtrated into political movements, academia, activism, or theory to a degree that resulted in praxis (social action and reflection). United States third world feminism started to become part of the feminist conversation in the 1980s, reflecting on international movements that dissected colonialism and its impact on society. As attention started to grow concerning women outside of the United States, courses dedicated to the plight of all women became popular in colleges and university establishments (Sandoval, 2000.

In the 1990s, Rebecca Walker put forth the concept of third-wave feminism in her essay, “To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism” (Rosen, 2006). This wave encouraged postmodern thinking to move beyond the traditional roles of gender and sexuality and urged women to engage in the struggle for queer rights, for the rights of marginalized women, and to speak out against pornography and the sex-work industry. An anticorporate stance, rejection of sexual harassment, and a concern with international injustices become pivotal to feminist discourse (such as female genital mutilation) became part of the discourse (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Rosen, 2006; Rothenberg, 2004). The newfound focus on women’s issues on a global scale sparked this research. Third-wave feminism

started to examine the position of women marginalized in society across and around the world.

Hegemony

Some theorists have made it clear that to fully understand the pillars of feminist theory, one must go beyond the lived experience women embody and look at the underlying issues of cultural *hegemony* (control or domination within a culture) and the patriarchal roots of a culture (Agger, 1992). In the United States and around the world, hegemony and patriarchal dominance can be traced back to colonial establishment (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, 2010; Freire, 2000; Ornstein, 2007; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Rosen, 2006; Rothenberg, 2004; Sandoval, 2000; Swarr & Nagar, 2010; Watkins, 2001).

The term hegemony was used first by sociologist, Antonio Gramsci (1971), in his, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks,* written from 1929 to 1935. Gloria Ladson-Billings (as cited by Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009) shared that many Critical Race Theorists (CRT) use the word hegemony to "describe the continued legitimacy of oppressive structures in American society" (p. 20). Peter Murrell (2007), stated that the "role of the educator is to find ways to interrupt the hegemony (e.g., racial stigma) and subordination in the classroom and society by facilitating the development of intellectual and social practices of critical thought, critical literacy, and analysis," (p. 100) in his work regarding race and culture.

In learning about the history of feminist theory and transnational feminine theory specifically, it is said that the primary focus of both is on cultural hegemony. Working toward equal rights of women and challenging the issues that oppress women around the globe is critical. *Transnational feminist* theory goes further by resisting globalization and

rejecting a common experience for women (anywhere and at any time) in its effort toward emancipating women. Although both the differences and commonalities between feminist theory and transnational feminine theory is exalted through my research, it will be imperative to recognize the tension and the joy of the experience of each female educator seeking social change. Some of the female participants of my research share their social action endeavors in third world countries outside of the United States. In these cases, transnational feminine theory sheds light on the experiences of both the transnational women and the educator-participants' as they engage in social action with a shared emphasis on gender, culture, and hegemony.

Transnational Feminine Theory

This section looks closely at what transnational feminine theory is and how it applies to my research. The female educators of my study have been intricately involved in social action that is directly related to the emancipation of marginalized individuals; some have been working specifically toward lifting the oppression on females either inside or outside of the United States (e.g., Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, the Chuuk State in the Federate States of Micronesia, Rwanda, and Zambia). Others have worked to enhance the human condition of oppressed people—whether male or female, adult or child. The salient difference in naming the feminist perspective I will embrace—transnational feminine theory—is that it respects each women's experience as individual and unique around the world while recognizing that power structures within relationships do exist (e.g., White, Eurocentric, masculine, heterosexual attitudes likely influence experiences; Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Tickner & Sjoberg, 2011).

I rely on the definition of transnational feminine theory put forth by Jacqui M. Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1997), extolling that transnational feminism embodies the following key elements that international feminism does not:

1. *A way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world.*
2. *An understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples, rather than as a set of traits embodied 'in all non-US citizens (particularly because US citizenship continues to be premised within a white, Eurocentric, masculinist, heterosexist regime).* (p. xix)

Critique of Western thinking about feminism often points to a White privileged, United States-colonizing, Eurocentric approach to female oppression that does very little to advance dialogue and action to support marginalized women and women of color, both within and outside the United States. Authors of, *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar (2010) wrote:

> We argue for a transnational feminist praxis that is critically aware of its own historical, geographical, and political locations, even as it is invested in alliances that are created and sustained through deeply dialogic and critically self-reflexive processes of knowledge production and dissemination. (p. 3)

Positing that the deep importance of a historical, geographical, and political lens when considering transnational feminism is vitally important because to examine the female experience of women in various countries around the world, the context of those lives need to be respected and understood. Transnational feminism rejects the terms *international feminism* or *global feminism* claiming that both propagate the archetypes of capitalism and corporate control, while lacking an understanding of the female experience as being extremely personal and specific to each woman in their own culture at a specific time (Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Sandoval, 2000; Tickner & Sjoberg, 2011).

Acknowledging the individual lives of each woman and resisting categorizing women outside of the United States, Europe, and Canada as having the same issues, challenges, and obstacles related to inequality, human rights, culture, religion, sexuality, and gender roles would be an injustice in and of itself. A singular view of what it means to be a woman can be both dangerous and nonproductive in assisting marginalized women, no matter what the cause or situation (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, 2010; Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Sandoval, 2000; Swarr & Nagar, 2010; Tickner & Sjoberg, 2011).

As the world has changed and people have become more connected through the vast exchange of communication and information sharing, geopolitical issues are more accessible to the public at large. Swarr and Nagar (2010) state that the "growing interest in questions of globalization, neo-liberalism, and social justice have fueled the emergence and growth of transnational feminism in interdisciplinary studies" (p. 2). It is important to recognize that the study of transnational feminism, as it traverses various intercontinental boarders, analyzes the lives of women of various cultures and races, and therefore, is not restricted to women of poverty in third world countries.

Mohanty (2003) warned against the "homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the Third World" that entraps much of the Western feminist discourse into considering third world women as all the same (pp. 19-20). The result of grouping third world women into one category (a singular image of oppression) results oftentimes in painting a picture of all women as victims of their circumstances without choice, refuge, or freedom. Though this may be the case for some, it would be narrow-minded and irresponsible to assume this is the position of all.

> A homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which in turn produces the image of an 'average Third World woman.' This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'Third World' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). (Mohanty, 2003, p. 22)

Debate continues as to the mere term, third world, suggesting that it too can create a single image of marginalized women around the globe. Similar to the debate as to how social action that supports women across all boarders should be named (i.e., transnational feminism, color feminisms, third world feminisms, multicultural feminisms, international feminisms, or global feminisms). As a reminder and as examined in Chapter One, I consider third world to mean emergent nations reliant on First-World nations or the geographic Southern hemisphere.

Let it be with an open mind that we internalize the shared experiences of the female educators of my research to be unique so that we may construct a tomorrow, unbridled by limitations based on gender, class, or race (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Naples & Desai, 2002; Sandoval, 2000; Swarr & Nagar, 2010).

Summary of Thoughts

Considering the body of writing amassed thus far, and my reflective thoughts turned to word, I feel rapt with anticipation, wonder, and curiosity. What will the female educators share? How introspective will their narratives be? Will their engagements with social action be the undoing of who they once were as young girls—now changed, perplexed, doubting—or will they be empowered, inquisitive, maybe even wiser? I feel that my own transformation—all the experiences, understanding, and learning I have gained over the years—has left me with more questions than answers. At moments, I feel

more of a student than an educator. Often, the oppressed and marginalized with whom I collaborated with become my sage, my advisers, my mentors and counselors.

I learned so much in regards to what it means to make peace with life. Influenced by Buddhist principals while living in Thailand, I noticed that the *Four Noble Truths* guided many there (Nhat Hanh, 1998). By proxy, I acquired from neighbors and friends some of these principles that abetted in my own metamorphosis or transformation. A tacit realization still grows within me, like a sprawling vine over a trellis, regarding some of these insights. For example, now I accept that life includes both suffering (i.e., pain, sadness, strife) and happiness (i.e., health, joy, harmony). If one does not experience suffering, happiness is virtually unrecognizable and unappreciated. Implicit in recognizing the existence of suffering in the world and in one's self, is also the wanting to find its place of origin or nature. Power, across all cultures (among the powerFul and the powerLess), is rooted in this understanding. Because I have seen students living in poverty in the United States and abroad, as well as those living in affluence, I can see more clearly the inequities that exist, the educational system at large, and the political framework that holds a community together or tears it apart. With that acknowledgement, a vision for what I should strive for as a social change agent and educator myself becomes more vibrant each day.

Also embedded within these *truths* is the notion that all things are temporary, like a fleeting thought or a storm that passes over the landscape. Temporality gives those who are suffering hope, I feel. Once a person loses faith in the idea that situations are temporary, it may be difficult to break through barriers of confinement and move to a habitus that is transformational. Thoughts and physical objects are also thought to be

temporary in the scope of the Four Noble Truths. Hereto is an aspect of transformation that has influenced my own meta-analysis of the world around me. Suffering can be felt when one attaches him or herself to ideas, things, and situations because those things cannot remain as we know them. Thoughts and objects will likely be altered or lost.

Injustices should not be left to the winds of time to correct. Although temporal, some situations can last for years, decades, or centuries. In the case of starvation or health epidemics for instance, where the death tolls continue to rise, it is not enough to simply wait these catastrophes out. When given the opportunity to fight for women's rights, speak out against racial discrimination, or end civil war, people should embrace the obligatory stance of not here, not now, not again. This is my knowing, my truth. "Cessation from creating suffering" or the desire to stop suffering represents another noble truth (Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 11). However lasting or pliable this truth may be, I am certain that within me resides the seed of human respect that will continuously give birth to new ideas that will always flow forth from this essential nucleus of who I am. Lastly, toward a path of transformation and in relation to these truths involves the notion of finding meaning in how we speak, view the world, act, and position ourselves as conscious and mindful people in the world.

There are no heroes and no perfect way of engaging in social change. The difference between right and wrong is sometimes the width of a hair. It does not take the power of a genius mind to institute change. It does not require fame or fortune. Social change can be small or grand in magnitude and defined by each in his or her own way. As the female educators of this study shared their own lived experiences, they have arrived at their place of *knowing*. Each has defined what it means to them to be an

educator, what social change signifies, and how their personal perceptions of self and the world have transformed over the years.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

> *If experience and theory contradict each other, one of the two must be reexamined.* (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 188)

Theory Meets Method

Essential to my research is the application of theory and how it interplays with the experiences of female educators enacting social change in the world. The ability of a researcher to share his or her own experience with participants and readers represent an important aspect to scholarly writing. In doing so, the researcher openly shares and concedes his or her own personal biases, values, and beliefs extracted from such lived experiences. This ability to position one's self within the writing *reflexively* is crucial (Creswell, 2013). John W. Creswell stated:

> How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is 'positioned' and within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges. (p. 215)

His views on the researcher positioned within the work spoke to my curiosities regarding the transformation of female educators like myself. If life experiences build on one another and influence a person's life journey, the culmination of lived experiences of the participants must be surely filled with a layering of events that have matured into a portrait of the self.

Coupled with the necessity for the writer-researcher to examine his or her own lived experiences is the researcher's ability to examine the lived experiences of the participants to determine how those experiences will overlay with the phenomenon of social change. The participants of my research posit themselves as educators, ranging from professors, to activists, trainers, consultants, and nonprofit associates. All of who have taken a vested interest in world affairs and have been active agents in trying to secure social change in the world to improve the human condition. Applying feminist theory while examining their work through the critical and interpretive paradigms will be paramount.

To legitimize any claims or conclusions that come forth from an experience shared and written about in the academic world, a responsibility exists to ground such thoughts in theory. After all, theory links humanity to the social sciences. Researchers agree that raw data cannot always impart the necessary backstory needed to provide a reader with ample meaning and context, just as neither of the two alone can be accepted as scholarly without the support of theory (Lukenchuk, 2013; Sim & Van Loon, 2001).

This study is positioned within the critical and interpretive paradigms of research (Creswell, 2013). In this regard, I have aspired to elicit the lived experiences of female educators as they enact social change in the world by applying narrative, as method, and feminist theory as the conceptual framework. Additionally, I hoped to bring understanding to how the CTC unfurls itself during the process of social action toward change. The CTC has provided an understanding of how situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis blend together to constitute one's identity and perceptions of the world, thereby transforming an individual in pursuit of social change. To ground my

work surrounding social change and its impact on the identity and worldviews of the change agents, the applied qualitative research theory and approach will be expounded upon. Figure 3 ties all research elements of the study together to bring a cohesive structure to the work.

Figure 3. Framework of the research.

Figure 3. The framework of this qualitative study highlights the corresponding and related aspects of each research element utilized in this study (Creswell, 2013; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Lukenchuk, 2013; Short, 1991).

Narrative as Research Design

> *We have to launch ourselves and those others who are free to go on new adventures in sense-making. And, yes, we have to set many others free again, and one way to think of understanding freedom, you recall, is to think of it as the capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise.* (Arendt, 1968, p. 63)

The narratives of women who posit themselves as educators and have dedicated their lives to fostering social change in the world are the conduits used to share their transformative stories as change agents. Identifying as professors, activists, trainers, nonprofit associates, and/or volunteers, these women share a common interest in bettering the human condition. By the nature of reflecting upon their social action work, as well as their perceptions of personal identity and the world, readers are afforded the insight needed to recognize how praxis and agency have played out through the hands of these women across the globe (Lather, 1991; Mohanty, 2003). Each of the women of this study has dedicated much of her life to social justice efforts to emancipate marginalized individuals. Some the marginalized and oppressed individuals they have worked with struggle against poverty, class or racial discrimination, or gender bias.

In the words of Diane Ketelle (2010), writing about the lived experience of each woman through a narrative lens has the promise to "teach, represent, identify, explain, persuade, and reinforce social boundaries while communicating power structures" in our society (p. 549). The sentiment embedded within this statement speaks to the influence that narratives can have on society and the influence that power structures have on our experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Narratives help weave a tapestry that can enlighten the world regarding our tribulations, victories, and defeats so that the everyday person may internalize the meaning in such a way that can be educative. Speaking to the notion that we can learn from other people's experiences gives way to the phenomenon that humans are capable of social learning to expand their ways of knowing (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, 1977, 1995). The narratives, the stories of these women, presents a raw depiction of how they have interacted with their own

cultural identity to promote social change while intermingling with that of another. Understanding how they met the challenge of such adversity in the community they served was instrumental to their personal transformation.

Within the fabric of each lived experience told lay an unfolding of history, I believe. Each woman's personal history, in her own place and time, becomes interwoven with the history of our world (Habermas, 1971; Miller, 1990). A history geographically encrypted to teach life lessons and to remind of the power we wield as agents of change speaks to a critical lens of inquiry. Susan E. Chase (2005) delineated ways in which a narrative inquiry is typically approached. She pronounces that the following aspects are integral to the narrative process to extract meaning:

- Engage in acts of discourse (the interview or conversation with the participants).
- Understand the social situations and the positionality of the participants (how the participants act and synthesize the world given the context they are working in or the marginalized individuals they are working with).
- Interpret the information shared.

Chase (2005) further opined that these approaches to narrative include a "way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (p. 656). Thus, a story with a beginning, middle, and an end develops. Chase (2005) stated that narrators "develop interpretations and find ways in which to present or publish their ideas about the narratives they stud[y]" (p. 567). Thereby, the interpretive paradigm is supported when writing about the lives of others. By interpreting the oral

histories of the women through their future interviews, a dense description of their motives to pursue social change action and how it changed their meaning structures will likely spill forth.

Most significant in sharing these lived experiences is the emphasis on praxis (action and reflection). Patti Lather (1991) makes the claim that by virtue of recounting the praxis of others, inquiry regarding civility is promoted, human capacity to contribute positively to the world is heightened, and the notion of equality is supported. This naturally aligns with a critical paradigm once again. By bringing to life the endeavors of these female educators as they span the globe in various embodiments of what it means to be an educator, their work becomes important to the human experience, in general (Arendt, 1958; Bruner, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lather, 1991; Miller, 1990; Short, 1991). As these women push the boundaries of social dominance and power where they engage in social action, splinters of the critical paradigm will continue to edge their way into the narratives.

Janet Miller (1990) eloquently captured the notion of channeling both the differences and similarities in our narratives with the following quote:

> Thus, our narratives reflect individual questions, perspectives, areas of dissonance and dissatisfaction; they are woven together by the threads of our similarities and our differences as we attempt to understand and to act upon our own possibilities and upon our commitments to the creation of spaces where voices can be raised within and across the differences that divide us. (p. 7)

It will be essential for us as readers, observers, and researchers to never lose sight of each individual's experience, and keep in mind that each one is temporal and spatial. When capturing the spirit of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (2003) work regarding transnational feminine theory, it will be critical to resist creating a portraiture of a collective experience

that posits all women as the same.

Moving forward, the application of the narrative approach in my work has been a delicate endeavor. Creating an accurate narrative of each participant's gender, race, situation, and positionality within their work sheds light on the origins of their self-perceptions and worldviews. The geographical and geopolitical history of each woman's worksite is critical when analyzing what it means to be the Other while collaborating with various marginalized individuals. The efforts of these female educators—to help individuals seek emancipation from oppressive forces around the world—have created the transformative narratives at the core of this research. Socioeconomic challenges, social dominance and power, and gender bias have been part of the lived experience these women of change have endured on a personal front while advocating for the rights of others (Chase, 2005; Habermas, 1971; Miller, 1990).

My assumptions were that the embodiment of the female educators of my research working in third world countries or with marginalized people who embraced a culture different from their own here in United States and Australia, would have been presented with challenging obstacles due in part to their gender. Views on feminist theory can be controversial, varied, and divergent. In considering sharing the experiences of these women as a catalyst for social change in the world, I felt it pertinent to explore feminist theory, emphasizing transnational feminine theory.

Feminist theory, in general, aims to "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" in the world, as explained by Patti Lather (1991, p. 71). Our socially constructed world has been built by male dominated views, beliefs, and traditions that have often left women in the

periphery as acknowledged, included, respected, and empowered members of society (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Ali et al., 2000; Creswell, 2013; Rosen, 2006; Rothenberg, 2004; Sandoval, 2000; Sim & Van Loon, 2001; Swarr & Nagar, 2010). The female study participants all work to this end; as women they have stepped into their power in society attempting to be heard and making their visions a reality.

John W. Creswell (2013) expressed views on feminist theory, suggesting that researchers seek an understanding of issues such as women's identities, sex roles, abortion activism, affirmative action, domestic violence, social power, and familial and corporate hierarchies. Like others, Creswell also holds forth that researchers "need to consciously and systematically include their own roles or positions and assess how they impact their understandings of a woman's life" (p. 30). Considering the roles of my participants and my attraction to studying social action, my own lived experiences become relevant to the narrative. As a researcher, being able to share and show that women have agency (the ability to act against oppression or domination) and to dissect what it means to be a women in the context of an individual's lived experience is crucial in demonstrating the transformative nature of their social action work.

As the nexus between social action and lived experiences start to emerge during the research, so too did the link to feminist theory and transformation. As Ali et al. (2000) stressed in their work, *Global Feminist Politics: Identities in a Changing World,* feminists, in essence, search for transformation; transformation on a micro and macro level. This transformative goal ranges from personal to the whole of society in the pursuit of democracy and social justice. Nestled in the female educators' yearning to seek social justice, is also a desire to see the fruits of their labor in the form of transformation. These

characteristics are the hooks that tow feminist theory forward and allow it to continue to thrive in a postmodern world.

Situated among marginalized groups and third world inhabitants, transnational feminine theory is the syphon of interpretation utilized to make clear every participants' experience as exclusively individual and her own. Each narrative has been constructed from a myriad of culminating lived experiences based on her race, class, gender, age, and geographic repertoire throughout life. If she herself is part of a typically marginalized group, it cannot be assumed that she, too, has encountered subjugation, discrimination, or oppression. Likewise, if she works with typically marginalized people, it cannot be assumed that the group has encountered subjugation, discrimination, or oppression. Each participant's story has been written and interpreted for the first time. For those women who may have been acculturated into a White, colonial existence, it has been interesting to see how they engage as the Other and with those who identify with being oppressed and marginalized in society.

Participants

The participants of this study are all females enacting social change in the world. Initially, I determined pivotal criteria in advance to isolate potential participants from diverse geographical locales (Creswell, 2013; Roberts, 2010). At the onset, I identified two essentials for selecting participants: (a) women's rights groups and female educators and (b) different countries spanning across the Western world and third world hosting the work of these women or organizations. A sample of approximately 126 organizations and female educators surfaced that carried out social action work in regions both within and outside the United States that interested me.

Subsequently, I moved to purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was helpful to the researcher in finding meaning in experiences directly related to the established research questions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). At this stage, I considered my research questions to specifically select potential participants that would allow me to investigate how situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis might blend together effecting lived experiences regarding views on self and the world. From the 126 organizations and educators I had first connected with, I then utilized this criterion firmly grounded in finding females who viewed themselves as individuals embarking on social change in the world and who were interested in sharing their lived experiences as social change agents.

These potential participants were informally asked if they viewed themselves as agents of social change in the world and what type of educator they considered themselves to be (i.e., activist, professor, nonprofit worker). Those who I had verified as educators—by way of either a nonprofit affiliation or having taught formally for an academic institution—qualified for my study. Further exploring the experiences of these individuals resulted in a short, open-ended questionnaire, which the researcher emailed to participants, asking about the nature of their work and general thoughts regarding social change. Upon reviewing the various responses to these preliminary questions, I informally invited the individuals (spanning three continents with a range of social action experiences) to participate in my qualitative research study. The following provides a sample of the preliminary questions emailed to potential candidates:

- *Please share a little bit about what you do currently.*
- *What type of educator do you consider yourself to be?*

- *How long have you been/were you an educator?*
- *Please share what content area, grade level, and state or country you taught/trained in.*
- *What social cause(s) have you been affiliated with?*
- *What does social change mean to you?*
- *What has been your focus area of social change?*
- *Do you have the ability to Skype 3-4 times from October 2014 to April 2015?*

The chosen female participants ranged in age, were available for a series of three interviews, and communicated an interest in the study. They have worked to overcome oppressive issues in society and have collaborated with marginalized people in the hopes of raising social consciousness regarding gender, class, socioeconomic, and/or racial inequality. Although anonymity was offered to all participants, all but one of the women agreed to full disclosure by way of signing Informed Consent forms.

Sources of Data and Methods of Data Collection

The female educator participants communicated their lived experiences through interviews conducted by me, as researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This process of extracting meaning through interviews has lead to "thick descriptions" and has offered patterns connecting the social endeavors of each female educator, and discussed fully in Chapters Five and Six (Johnson, 2002, p. 104). While imploring a narrative approach, observations and questions that arose throughout the interview series were captured through written field notes (Green et al., 2006). Maintaining both descriptive and reflective field notes while interacting with the participants offered further data "without

inferring feelings or responses" about what was actually happening during the research process (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 88).

Interviews

Participants took part in a series of semistructured, in-depth interviews conducted in person, by telephone, or via Skype (video conferencing). In-depth interview questions "allow[ed] the words of the respondent, and his or her experiences and perspectives, to shine through" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102). The "in-depth interviews are a conversation between the researcher and the interviewee" and became the primary source of data collection (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 18). These conversations were the building blocks to ensure validity to the process of qualitative inquiry and established "trustworthiness" with the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 48).

An interview guide (see Appendix D) was utilized during the semistructured interviews to ensure consistency in securing the details of the female educators' lived experiences while enacting social change. This enabled me to complete a narrative that that attempted to fully encompass the transformation of each participant.

The noted series of interviews created a safe place for the female educators to share

- their background as educator intellectuals;
- points of view regarding social change (self-efficacy);
- pivotal social change efforts they have been engaged in (agency, praxis);
- the challenges faced as a female in these change-agent roles (situationality and positionality);
- how they identify themselves in the world (situationality and

positionality);

- perspectives on worldviews regarding change for the betterment of society (agency, praxis); and
- how they have transformed throughout the process (CTC) of engaging in social action change.

As the interviews transpired, I employed the use of *memo-ing*. Memo-ing is the act of jotting down notes in terms of whether or not the data is coming together succinctly, like a puzzle. Through memo-ing, I entrusted a reflexive stance by documenting my thoughts as they related to my own positionality during the study and how they influenced my ideas regarding the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In conjunction, personal artifacts of the participants were examined, such as email communication, resumes, personal websites, and the websites of organizations to gain further insight into their professional and social action endeavors (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Data Analysis Method

Regarding qualitative research, the process by which the researcher sifts through the data to find meaning is a "dynamic dance," according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 36). Hesse-Biber and Leavy both advised that, "One must be open to discovery" (p. 36). The interview transcripts, field notes, and memos I obtained were read and interpreted to ascertain common and uncommon themes between participants to make meaning of their lived experiences. While interpreting these interviews and exhuming the themes shared, a filter built from my own language and culture undoubtedly applied; weaving together their stories and integrating my own reflexivity as researcher, woman, and social change agent (Riessman, 2008). The impact that being a social change agent

has had on their views of self and the world in relation to the CTC—while applying the quintessence of feminist theory—has been paramount in the study.

Chapter Four details the personal narratives of female educators, giving life to the moments that shaped them. Coding (categorizing) the transcripts of each interview, while considering artifacts, field notes, and memos to aggregate the data around emergent themes linked to the research questions was vital, particularly to Chapter Five findings. Triangulating the data added validity to the analysis and the interpretations presented to uncover the extent to which social action led to transformation of the female educators. The culmination of this study concludes with Chapter Six threading together themes and the possible implications of this work in the education field and the social sciences. Connecting the dots between educator, social action change, and transformation is relevant to all human well-being (Creswell, 2013; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Roberts, 2010).

Ethics of the Study

The ethical standards as set by the Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB) at National Louis University for conducting ethical research involving human participants has been followed with great diligence. As outlined by the IRRB, all participants were provided an Informed Consent form (see Appendix C) with the option of complete anonymity or agreement of disclosure (i.e., name, affiliate organization or institution, and other identifying pieces of information shared through interviews). For the participant who chose anonymity, a pseudonym has been given to protect her confidentiality. All participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason, if so desired.

Researcher's Self-Reflections

Looking back at my educational philosophy as an educator, I clearly see the tentacles of humanism and constructivism wrapped around my thinking and actions over the years. As a school administrator and graduate instructor in the education field, I often ask the students of my classes to ponder what their philosophy is and to then dig deeper to uncover the actual roots of that philosophy. Where was such thinking born or how did it evolve over the years? For me, my educational philosophy began in that humble little town I mentioned much earlier, in upstate New York. It is strewn out over the many memories created with my family and the values my parents instilled in me to respect others. I learned by their example that doing what is right is not always easy. Very few people share that a change in perspective takes time and patience, but it does. It may even refute a value system that has long been in place.

My thirst for adventure and traveling initially drew me to the Peace Corps. However, as my capacity to empathize with others matured, so did my newfound desire to learn about various people and cultures. This interest soon moved beyond exploring new cultures and manifested into a passion to explore the issues and challenges that met people of different walks of life. Anticipating my doctoral studies, I looked for a program that encompassed social inquiry and education. This flipped a switch inside of me and catapulted me into a new stratosphere of discovery.

Considering the knowledge I absorbed from my life experiences and study, I felt well equipped to embark on the research at hand. With a solid foundation in the expression of narrative inquiry, I hope that the fruits of such labor results in sharing the lives of the female educators of this study in a way that best represents their perspectives

of self (identity) and the world, as they have been transformed by the social change they have pursued. My deepest desire involves honoring each woman as an intellectual and a unique individual. By way of including their own historicity, the geopolitical context in which they work, and the strides they may or may not have made enacting social change in the world, I look to understand their transformation with incredible passion and the intent of conveying their metamorphosis with other educators.

CHAPTER FOUR: PORTRAITS OF THE WOMEN

> *Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.* (Chávez, 1984)

The remaining Chapters Four, Five, and Six represent a culmination of the six female educators' social action experiences. The past, present, and future become central to the analysis of their engagement, self-discovery, and transformation as it pertains to this qualitative research study. Chapter Four explains the narrative inquiry approach utilized during this study to conduct the interviews while sharing the personal narratives of each educator. Set forth later in Chapter Five are the in-depth findings, themes, and subthemes of each woman's individual experience emerging from the data and a cross-case analysis of their experiences. Together, these themes and subthemes highlight patterns and outliers, while examining how the context of their work influenced each unique experience. Chapter Six brings together the themes and examines the meaning and implications of the findings to the education field, the social sciences, and the individual change-makers themselves. As researcher, reflections regarding my own personal journey and how it impacted my own *being* and growth are brought to the forefront.

The dedicated efforts of each woman who engaged in social action and their transformations have transpired into the portraits held here in this chapter. Through the many exchanges we experienced—researcher and participant(s)—a human cord was struck inside of me that seems to still vibrate against the inner walls of my mind. I cannot

resist the urge to share the portraits of these women in such a way that each reader can first come to know them on a personal level and then consider the significance of the themes that surfaced in the following chapters. By allowing the reader to visualize the experiences, as if they too were present during the interview sessions, I aspire to evoke a personal understanding that is shrouded in a new human experience that the reader can call their own; calling upon the internal desire to question, analyze, and reflect as nature allows (Green et al., 2006; Short, 1991; Van Manen, 1990). The summaries embedded at the close of each portrait illuminate this point and illustrates patterns in the data related to my original research questions:

- How do female educators, as intellectuals, enact social change in the world?
- How can the lived experiences of these women transform their perceptions of self and their worldviews, as a result of engaging in social action?
- From the CTC perspective, how does transformation occur in these women's lives?

Dipping a proverbial toe into the water, let us start with how one makes meaning in a manner referred to as *three-dimensional narrative inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Theoretical Sensibilities: Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry

The method of analysis, the particular theoretical sensibilities I have employed in making meaning of the discussions that flowed forth from the interviews with the participants, stems from what D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000) referred to as "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 49). In this three-dimensional space of "situation, continuity, and interaction," it is said that one's inquiries are allowed to "travel– inward, outward, backward, forward, and [are] situated within place" (p. 49).

Here, the temporality of any experience is supported in that how I (for example), might see myself today might be very different from how I see myself 3 months or 3 years from now. The undeniable truth that acknowledging the *backward* and *forward* journey of one's experience—the context of the experience situated in the past, present, and future—all shape and influence how a human being transcends that space, internalizes those experiences, and reflects on its meaning to produce their own truth. Looking *inward* and exploring one's own feelings, thoughts, and reactions, as well as looking *outward* at the surrounding external environment (the conditions, the context), help generate meaning, purpose, and understanding of self and the world.

Within these three-dimensions of looking at narratives (situation, continuity, and interaction), as a narrative inquirer/researcher, I found that the stories of the women I had the privilege of speaking with for this study did in fact meander like a river through time. As each woman dug into the annals of her archived memories to share how she saw herself as a girl and how she sees herself now as a woman, how her understanding of the world has changed throughout the years, and how each individual set out to spark social change, I could not help but feel a oneness with them. Although we each shared a unique story, as researcher, the notion of reflexivity was starting to bubble underneath my skin. My questions, my wonderings, my reflections began to intermingle with the lived experiences of each of the women I interviewed (Creswell, 2013). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, narrative inquirers "are not alone in the three-dimensional space" (p. 60). Catherine Kohler Reissman (2008) corroborated the process of building and examining narratives as a researcher is a collaborative endeavor, a "co-construction" of sorts (p. 31).

The discourse itself that took place during the various interviews placed me in the position of extractor, gently tugging on details, expressing my own curiosity at times to encourage the women to share more fully the smallest of moments they had divulged. Like stretching a piece of chewing gum, after posing thoughtful questions, I would listen to their responses and stories and on occasion, interject with a further pondering that required a stripping back of layers; an undressing or excavating to reach the importance of the moment that lived within them. Riessman (2008) acknowledged this role of the researcher during the interview process as one of "active presence in the conversation" (p. 40).

As a reminder, Creswell's (2013) views on the researcher's role in feminist theory suggested that the researcher seeks an understanding of issues—such as women's identities—in recognition of their own positions and assesses how they impact their understandings of a woman's life. In addition, the importance of considering transnational feminism as it plays out in the context of social change work within marginalized communities around the world was noted earlier. Recognizing and respecting the *context* of the educators' upbringing and their social action efforts in order to examine the female experience as it related to perceptions of self, the world, and transformation is critical.

I found that the women of my study *engaged with me*, as opposed to *for me.* Revealing what was very deep and rich in meaning, a kind of clarity emerged that would have otherwise been missing if I had simply sat back and just listened to them. The conversations during our interviews led to the co-construction of the portraits in this chapter, by which both personal and societal dynamics seemed to influence all of the

women to aid in establishing their identity and transformation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). At the close of each woman's portrait, I provide an account of her transformation and the resulting themes. Now, let's meet the women of this study.

Portrait of Mariel Iezzoni

U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer and the Initiative for Global Development

(Born 1987; 27 years of age)

I came to meet Mariel online through the Country Director of Micronesia for the United States Peace Corps in the spring of 2014. Responding to my research description and appeal for participants, he was kind enough to pass Mariel's name on to me as a potential candidate by forwarding my email to her and wishing me well. After communicating with Mariel through email while she still served in the Lukunur Islands of Mortlock in the Chuuk Federate States of Micronesia (South Pacific Ocean, east of the Philippines), she expressed that she would be completing her 2-year stint as a volunteer and would be happy to take part upon returning to the states in the fall. Mariel seemed very excited and interested to be a part of the study and her fervor leapt from the screen as we initially emailed worlds apart.

Sitting in my Evanston home outside of Chicago, Illinois, Mariel was perched at her office in Washington, D.C., when we began our first interview in the chilly month of March 2015. Through Skype videoconferencing we saw each other for the first time. Mariel beamed, literally, with a smile from ear to ear and her eyes were bright as she leaned into the camera. Immediately I felt a sisterhood with her (likely birthed from our

relationship to the Peace Corps). She seemed genuinely excited to meet; fresh with the enthusiasm that the years in one's 20s often delivers. For a moment, I too, felt 27.

Currently the Executive Assistant to the CEO at the Initiative for Global Development, in Washington, D.C., Mariel shared that she grew up in a lower- to middle-class, White family in northeastern and eastern Pennsylvania. With a large extended family, she was the youngest of three children and recalled her grandfather's proud Italian heritage. "Say the Hail Mary in Italian and I'll give you a dollar," he used to say. Smiling widely, Mariel shared this memory as she recounted his harmless bribes as attempts to preserve his cultural roots. Her mother, a nurse, and her father, an accountant, divorced when she was a child. However, Mariel spoke fondly of her parents and her stepfather, sharing that they extended unwavering support to her over the years. "The sky wasn't even the limit," she said, as if this very remembrance might propel her beyond the stratosphere. Pride for her family seemed to emanate from her as she recounted how supported she felt social-emotionally throughout her life. Mariel explained in innocent terms how she saw the world and Pennsylvania while growing up. "As a kid, I really saw this as a very wondrous, magical place."

During childhood, the young girl in Mariel always wanted to go beyond Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and explore the world. "There's so much otherness that I wanted to be a part of it and understand everything about it," she voiced articulating her thirst to travel and understand people unlike herself. With a passion for theater and English, she obtained her Bachelor of Art degree at Penn State University, between 2006-2010, as she crept closer to her dream of traveling. At the age of 21, Mariel crossed the oceans to study abroad in Paris for a short time. Lured to further venture outside of the

boundaries of the United States, in 2012, Mariel joined the United States Peace Corps. It was her sense of feeling fortunate by growing up in a loving family and "having it good" that generated her sense of obligation to give back to the world. This perceived good fortune, unjustifiable privilege, luck, or blessing really resonated for me too as a motivating factor regarding my own life choices. I found this is what attracted me to social action, also. Another draw to Mariel's engagement with social action was her interest in topical news stories of war around the world and a longing to understand people and places outside of her own sphere.

As a Peace Corps volunteer, she would teach and train teachers in Lukunur Atoll, Micronesia for 2 years. When entering the Peace Corps, Mariel was provided with some precursory training as to what her role would be as a teacher and teacher trainer. However, untrained formally to be an educator, she felt overwhelming underprepared at the onset of her volunteer service. Mariel pushed past any self-doubt when she realized she had a special skill set. Her self-efficacy (belief in her ability to organize and engage in action) inspired a *can do* attitude. She shared in our conversations:

> I am someone who is just good at meeting people where they are [in life and learning]. And as a teacher, that was something I realized was a skill of mine; to be able to meet my students where they were, and the teachers that I was training, to meet them where they were.

When considering herself an educator, she shared that she is still evolving. Empowering both women and children on the island to take ownership of education and make it their own left a lasting impression on her. The role of educator in the Peace Corps certainly was a twofold responsibility. In tandem with social action, Mariel felt that as an agent of social change that her job involved helping the female teachers of Lukunur Atoll find

value in their work and realizing that they had a positive impact on both the students and their community. Through her own eyes, she considered being an educator, in terms of changing peoples' perceptions and opening them up to viewing both themselves and others differently:

> I see an educator as someone who acts as a catalyst to change perceptions. Changing perception of how they see themselves and their ability. Changing their perceptions about the world that's in front of them or changing perceptions about the world around us.

Breaking down false perceptions of Others (stereotypes) was of paramount importance to Mariel. A sudden contemplative demeanor seemed to come over her as she expounded on the role of an educator. A serious tone in her voice only left room for a lingering softness as she then posited that, "I think an educator is about investing in other people . . . and what emerges from that is infinite." *Investing* in people, she explained, by educating them. Learning alongside of others, as equals, as opposed to merely donating funds or time, will likely lead to empowerment, sustainable change efforts, and a problem solving approach to authentic issues within any community.

In reflecting on the specifics of her Peace Corps work, Mariel shared that her social action was spurred by helping to design an 8-year plan to guide teachers in the remote Pacific Islands of the Federate States of Micronesia to improve educational planning. The entire population on the small island of Lukunur Atoll (part of the greater Mortlock Islands) fluctuated between 300-400 people. By way of collaborating with the principal and teachers, Mariel assisted in writing an engaging curriculum that was aligned both vertically and horizontally across all subject areas and grades. Mariel recommended transferring high-quality teachers to the lower grades, where fundamental skills were a

prerequisite for deep learning and critical thinking. Additionally, Mariel took on the challenge of providing Peace Corps leadership with a long-range plan to prepare and train future volunteers on Lukunur Atoll islands and to maintain two volunteers at the school site: one to train teachers while the other continuously worked to further advance curriculum writing. The hope was that the process of learning, teaching, and professional development would become a self-sustaining effort over time or at least, one that could be cultivated with volunteer support.

In her words, "As an agent of social change my job was to open the window and help the women that I worked with, for example, see their job as important, see that they could have a positive effect on their students." On the topic of social change, I asked Mariel what social action and social change meant to her personally. Simply put, she said, "to show up." Figuratively, Mariel spoke about the significance of mentally being in the moment and being aware of the culture and context of a given situation. Literally, she spelled out the importance of showing up in the classroom each morning to work with her students.

Cultural norms on Lukunur Island had cultivated an acceptance of teachers (male teachers in particular) to abandon their classes for up to six months at a time and then show up one day, unabashed, to resume teaching the very students they left behind. This cycle of behavior trickled down to the children who in turn did not view attendance as essential to the learning. Therefore, "showing up" was a value that Mariel modeled, taught, and instilled in her students throughout her time there. She laughed, recalling a memory about a year and a half into her service. The skies poured rain and Mariel walked to school barefoot in the early morning, her bags in tow. All 33 of her students were

present in class that day; however, nobody else (teacher or adult) came to school. These small achievements meant a great deal to her:

> One of my favorite memories at Peace Corps, my primary job was to train other teachers. And that was my job. And I didn't have one or two classes that were my own. And so I taught eight grade English by myself in first period. And I told my students every day, 'Eight o'clock I'm here and I'm going to start working. And you better be here, too.' And on rainy days, the moment it was raining, no one would show up to school. And it was maybe after a year, I'd been teaching there for a year-and-a-half, it was pouring out.
>
> And definitively, I knew what was going to happen but I thought, 'No, no, I'm going. I'm showing up.' And I really didn't expect anyone to [show up]. So, I'm walking to school and my kids see me and they're laughing because I'm walking barefoot with my bags, trying to make it to school. And I get to the classroom and one kid shows up and another kid then shows up. And at exactly 8:00 when I began to start the class, all 33 of my students showed up. And nobody else had school that day. So, I think, the way to be a social agent for change is to show up.

Mariel shyly explained that her larger curricular goals for change might have been a bit ambitious and initially, she did not account for all of the cultural differences that she would have to overcome. "We owe it to all people to give them dignity and respect for who they are instead of trying to change them." She articulated that the frustrations that typically arise between people are related to gaps in understanding and respect. The idea of trying to avoid changing others became wedged in my mind. As Mariel spoke, I found myself wondering if the various participants of the study would also reveal the same viewpoint when they recalled their experiences and transformations.

A fusion of cultural and gender mores were daunting at times for Mariel. As culture would have it, the female teachers with which Mariel trained did not have the platform to speak their minds and share their concerns about the absenteeism of the professionals or the students on Lukunur. Mariel acknowledged that being a White American, she was offered special latitude to speak openly about her thoughts and share

her suggestions and opinions—a right that the Lukunur women coveted and rallied behind. At times, they asked Mariel to speak to the principal on their behalf and delicately engage in conversation that could change the school culture, while still saving face and avoiding embarrassing colleagues. Although the social customs remained, the school principal was hopeful that a cultural exchange of sorts would permeate throughout the staff in due time. He served as a confidant and supporter of Mariel's work during the 2 years she taught alongside the Lukunur teachers.

However, as we examined the characteristics of gender roles, culture on the island of Lukunur Atoll, and what it meant to be the Other as she carried herself as a young, White, American, female educator, interesting realizations surfaced that I found myself experiencing when I too, was in the Peace Corps in Thailand. Meandering between an emotional awareness of a) the views of the Lukunur Islanders regarding Americans, and b) American views of developing third world countries, Mariel openly discussed the challenges that both frustrated and motivated her.

Within the context of being a volunteer on the island between 2012-2014, Mariel first seemed to see few limitations to being an American in a foreign land while engaging in social change. She felt both respected and heard. Yet, the more we talked, the more Mariel opened up about the boundaries that were exerted upon her (whether consciously or unconsciously) by the Lukunur people. "I really became a perpetual student of the culture and then how they operated," she said. Learning the local language of Mortlockese helped to build trust and enabled her to work more collaboratively with the teachers of her school and the villagers. As the Other, her voice seemed to hover in the air even when the Lukunur women's had fallen silently to the ground. It was noticeable

that this double standard of respect shown toward Mariel and her female Lukunur colleagues was troublesome to her.

While sharing how the Micronesian culture viewed Americans and their outspoken ways, Mariel initially expressed the following:

> They're [Micronesians] not a confrontational people. If they want things to change, a lot of times it's done underneath the surface by quietly gossiping and talking amongst each other to create a stir but that they wouldn't be able to track it down to one person who is the instigator of these mumblings. So, everything is really under the surface. In contrast to American culture which is very outspoken.

However, as she dove deeper into conversation on the topic of female voice within the community, an interesting respect for the direct American approach surfaced:

> It's interesting because the [Micronesian] women really respected that about American culture and greatly admired it. They all really liked that . . . men and women alike, actually. They told me they liked how Americans were very direct with one another. But they knew that they (as a people) and they (as a culture) were not that [way]. And they were not going to change that.

At this juncture, I wondered about the extent of feminist empowerment that likely runs through the veins of most American women who experienced growing up in the 1990s. In particular, women who lived through third-wave feminism, recognizing marginalized women around the world (Rosen, 2006). Mariel seemed very compassionate toward the Lukunur women and wanted them to be heard within their own community.

Intriguingly, at another point in our conversation, Mariel wanted to clarify her thinking as it related to the American female and male Peace Corps experience and the role of *nurturer* in communication, problem-solving, and female solidarity. I found this fascinating; as I would later hear other participants reference the role of female nurturer, also:

> I struggle with *gender-fying* my experience. Because in some ways, I know men who have very feminine qualities and women who have what are considered masculine qualities and vice versa. And so I wonder if I'm being too general when I just talk about this but I think there's something about feminine nature where women nurture. We are nurturers. There's something about that approach. And in teaching for example, that I think nurturing can be extremely effective when it comes to social change. Instead of what we would consider the more masculine (straight perhaps), just sort of bang down the door while the woman would just try to finesse it open.
>
> And I just think there's something about women's nature around the world. There's a sense of solidarity I have found traveling as well amongst women. I mean, on my island, it was very much the men hung out over here and the women hung out over there. And instantly becoming a part of the female community, I had my friends. I had my confidants. I had my teachers. And there's extensive solidarity amongst the women of what can we do together for our children that was very potent.

I wanted to share this poignant quote to establish Mariel's perceptions of self on Lukunur Island as it intersects with a transnational feminine experience and represents a metaphorical shedding of her Other skin. In solidarity, the women embraced her as a woman (one of them), not as an American.

Transformation and Summary

Mariel pondered the ways in which she has changed since being a young girl. She now understands about being more realistic regarding the role each person must play in the context of his or her own "story." No one can set another's goals. "It is each person's responsibility to themselves and to their community to act and be active in the things they wish would change in their lives and the lives of the people in their community." The great big world seems a little less "sparkly" to Mariel, the woman. She now truly sees that the "tapestry of stories" makes life so interesting; a culmination of various people's experiences that helps one make sense of the world and one's self. In the following quote, elements of each person's unique life story are recognized based on situation and context.

Even more impressive to me is Mariel's belief that all people are owed equal acknowledgement and respect in this world:

> People are people wherever you go. So I think I have a much more real perspective of the world now . . . everyone has their own story. How do you explain that? Everyone has their own story and their own reality and their own truth that is just as real as mine.

During our conversations about transformation, a realization regarding her own "powerlessness" at times in the midst of social change was acknowledged. It seemed a sad or difficult life lesson for Mariel, but nonetheless, one she needed to embrace. Being able to parse out the things that she had control/power over and the things that she did not, seemed to be part of her own personal transformation. This demonstration of praxis also led her to admit reluctantly that social change cannot be done alone; it requires a collective, in her view. Before closing this final interview session with Mariel, the spark in her eye returned avowing, "It's just a classic Peace Corps story of, well, I don't know how much I changed them but I'm certain that they changed me." This reflection or praxis of her social change efforts began with one long pause (a drawn breath that seemingly ignited her memory) and left me feeling as if I was looking back on myself so many years ago.

After returning to the United States from her Peace Corps experience, Mariel found that many Americans could not relate to her experience. She felt alone and struggled with readjusting to her once familiar culture. She told a story of how some American friends expressed pity for the children on Lukunur Island when looking at her photos:

> I came back from Peace Corps maybe frustrated. I felt very frustrated at times with how people would look at our pictures and see all of these poor little brown

> kids with no shoes . . . I became really frustrated with this concept of all those poor people in other countries. I lived on a tropical paradise. And those kids were very happy. And frankly, they were better off without shoes. Because their feet would become calloused. They wouldn't get cut as easily. If they had shoes all the time. Well, then their feet would be soft. Inevitably they would remove their shoes. Their shoes would be stolen and there you are . . . You have soft feet and you don't have shoes. I became really frustrated with this concept of all those poor people in other countries.

The inability of some American friends and family to recognize that the context and culture of the children's experience in Lukunur was simply different, not wrong, exemplifies the American and Eurocentric views that some transnational feminists have noted.

The cultural differences that Mariel encountered while living on Lukunur Island primarily revolved around views regarding women's voices and opportunities to share ideas openly among men, prioritizing religion over education (whether it be attendance or skipping school meetings to attend church meetings), and general views on life-work-balance. Her American identity was seared onto her in the eyes of her colleagues like a form of branding; inescapable by virtue of her accent and light skin tone. Inevitably, she rose to the top of the social order and was offered privileges (social dominance and social capital) most women were not because of her nationality and race, she believes. Being able to exercise direct and forthright communication simply because she was an American was a luxury that was typically out of bounds in Micronesian culture. In this space however, Mariel was able to act on her impulses to move the education system forward to be en route to creating a sustainable model for future volunteers and the Lukunur teachers. This combination of responding to the situation she was in, using the social dominance that was relinquished to her as the Other (positionality), and believing

she could make change happen (self-efficacy), all led to her social action change (agency) and transformation. As we discussed her life after returning from Peace Corps, Mariel's pride in her work and her personal transformation emanated.

I found Mariel to be a breath of fresh air, optimistic, and hopeful about her future as a catalyst for social change. Discussing how she identifies herself as an adult woman she shared, "I would define myself as a caring, empathetic, strong woman that is not defined by what I do, but who I am." Theater remains a stronghold in Mariel's life. Now back in the United States, she conveys messages of social justice through poetry, playwriting, and acting as a hobby. She hopes to be involved with films, documentaries, and storytelling as an act of "learning how to perceive things from the many complicated perspectives" of others and highlight various cultures and people around the globe. Her hope is "to send an honest message of the reality of things as they are" in the world in order to eclipse fictitious or false perceptions of others. Professionally, Mariel works for the Initiative for Global Development (IGD) in Washington, D.C. The mission of this nonprofit organization involves reducing poverty by stimulating business growth and investing in areas of high-need and high-potential in Africa. Through networking to build global connections, IGD fosters economic growth and opportunity as a means to recognize and defeat poverty.

Figure 4 presents more details regarding Mariel's experiences and social actions. Chapter Five explores these categories and themes in a more distinct fashion, in addition to examining the relationships across themes to other participants of the research study. Through such inquiry, both common and uncommon conditions related to transformation are revealed.

Figure 4. Unit analysis, Mariel Iezzoni: Categories and themes.

Category I: Perceptions of Self and World: Girl

Themes: Context: Pennsylvania, U.S. **Date of Birth:** 1987

Identity: Educated, White, Italian-American, female. Happy, family oriented. *Lucky*.

Situationality: Youngest child; divorced parents; supportive family; lower-middle class (socioeconomic status), Catholic. Small town. Felt *lucky*/privileged.

Positionality: Work hard to get ahead; no limits on success/dreams. Wanted to explore places and people outside of personal sphere.

Self-Efficacy: No limitations on abilities or dreams for the future.

World View: Wondrous, magical, *sparkly* place; dreamed of going abroad.

Category II: Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)

Themes: Defining Educator: Changes others' perceptions; storyteller; all things are connected; empower others to believe in self and see personal value; invest in others.

Agency: Volunteered for U.S. Peace Corps

Subthemes: Personal Education: Bachelor of Art degree, Theater and English at Penn State University, 2010.

Being an Educator: Evolving role; sees self as a *learner*.

Category III: Social Action, Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Defining Social Action: Something you believe in; a calling; a collective pursuit.

Context: U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer. Lukunur Islands of Mortlock, Chuuk Federate States of Micronesia, volunteer teacher

Dates of Social Change Engagement: 2012-2014 (presently)

Self-Efficacy: Tackled the job without teaching certification.

Agency: Empowered women teachers; taught students; created teacher training and curriculum plan.

Subthemes: Driving Forces Towards Social Action: Felt *lucky/*privileged as a child; parent encouragement; desire to understand world and go outside of own sphere; recognition of those *without*.

Pivotal Social Action Experience(s): Developed *Eight-Year Curriculum and Training Plan* in Lukunur Islands, U.S. Peace Corps.

Expectations/Goals: Develop curriculum and training plan with the Lukunur teachers; collaborate with marginalized female teachers.

Lessons Learned: Change is possible; change takes more than one person; initial expectations too high. Other peoples' perspectives must be realized. Trust needed.

Self-Awareness: Personal privilege recognized; experienced personal change after engaging in social action; sees self as *learner*.

Category IV: Response to Efforts in Lukunur (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Culture: Lukunur women had little voice (hegemony, social dominance and lack of power); nononfrontational norms; strong ties to religion (Catholic and Protestant); avoid losing face/embarrassing others or self. US foreign aide had been forced upon their government in 1986;White power because of being American (believed to be rich, educated).

Gender: Mariel was given authority to speak out on issues when local women could not because she was seen as a White, rich, educated, American, female (social dominance and power). Female unity, solidarity.

Other: Needed to earn trust of the Lukunur people; learning Mortlockese language helped; collaborating with locals earned respect; Americans viewed as very direct; Mariel viewed as charismatic, theatrical. Must observe another's perspective; listen to their stories.

Inner-Conflict: In an effort to bring change to education, Mariel had to learn cultural meeting habits (best times to have a rehearsal for a play); realization that U.S. foreign aide had been forced upon their government in 1986; inferiority and superiority complex of Lukunur people; Americans viewed pictures of the Lukunur people and felt pity.

Category V: Perceptions of Self and World: Woman (Praxis)

Themes: Context: Washington, D.C.

Identity: U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer; Executive Assistant at the Initiative for Global Development. Strong, empathetic, caring person; not defined by *what* she does but *who* she is; sees self as actor and playwright regarding social justice issues. Nurturer.

World View: Life is messy; realizes that some things are out of one's control/sphere of influence.

Category VI: Transformation and Life Lessons (Praxis)

Themes: Transformation: Peace Corps changed her life and views; will continue to pursue international social change development; sees self as an artist, understands own *powerlessness*.

Lessons Learned: Views women as nurturers; sees solidarity among women globally; change requires the masses/a collective effort; change is a process; all people are of equal importance; people are essentially the same (needs and wants); everyone has a *story* and *truth* worth telling and sharing.

How Others Might View Her Efforts: American peers do not seem to understand the social context of her work in Lukunur. They feel sorry for the Lukunur people, unable to understand that they are happy.

Personal Hopes: All work will be done in an effort to teach others about various parts of the world (people and cultures) and to help others see the world through a different perspective; share other's stories and experiences in an honest way through film and storytelling.

Figure 4. Combines both the categories and the themes that were delineated from Mariel's narratives and the characteristics or subthemes that were also extracted.

Portrait of Jillian Foster

CEO and Founder of Global Insight International, Founder of Feminist Dialogue, and Adjunct Instructor

(Born 1984; 31 years of age)

The far-reaching grasp of social media and online communication also led me to Jillian. By way of Linkedin, I was able to post the premise of my research study and share the need for participants with like-minded people. I discovered Jillian's profile when searching for women interested in gender studies and human rights. After sending her a message communicating the purpose of the study, she telephoned to obtain more details and inquire about other perspective candidates in general terms. She initially seemed reserved but curious and expressed a willingness to jump on board.

Jillian's tenacity rang loudly starting at the onset of our telephone interviews. Always on the go, one session took place as she maneuvered through the morning rush and onto the New York City subway headed for work. Founder and CEO of the company Global Insight International, as well as the founder of the nonprofit group, Feminist Dialogue, she described her need to reconcile and rebut the "fucked up world" that oftentimes created barriers for women and marginalized individuals. Her passion regarding the topic of internal oppression and gender studies is also carried out in her current work as an adjunct instructor at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Although her approach was blunt at times, Jillian articulated various issues she believed impacted women, their identity, and the social construct of the world perpetuated by masculinity

and violence. Jillian and her *tell it like it is* personality exemplified the New Yorker she had become, which enabled me to relate and feel akin to her by the close of our sessions.

Jillian's tone was extremely matter of fact at the start of our encounters. Growing up in a fifth-generation family in California, Jillian balanced the Mormon religion and fitting in as a child. Being Mormon felt like a "shameful burden" or made her feel "weird," she expressed on more than one occasion during our interviews. The weight of these early childhood experiences seemed to bother her still as an adult. Though she distanced herself from identifying as Mormon (and eventually left the church), the lingering effects were obvious:

> It's only been in the last couple years that I've felt more comfortable about telling people that I used to be Mormon because people can get really weird about it. And it's definitely kind of shaped my path for sure, and it continues to shape my path because I have insider knowledge on that experience and that church and that world. But I don't live in that world anymore and I haven't lived in that world for a decade now.

In an effort to uncover more about Jillian's ethnic roots and family, our conversation shifted a bit. Little was known or shared about her ancestry. Identifying as a White woman, Jillian offered that she felt detached from her Native American heritage, which she knew very little about. The older of two children, Jillian recounted that she was raised predominantly by a single mother, although her father was present in her life after her parents divorced. She acknowledged that her view of the world was likely constructed through the eyes of her single mother who raised Jillian and her brother predominantly on her own. Watching her mother struggle as a single mom and a professional admittedly shaped the lens with which Jillian came to see the world. Realizing the strength required of her mother as the main caregiver, Jillian had an epiphany:

> I never know how to say that because having a single mother, I think some people think that my dad was entirely absent, but that's not necessarily what it means, in my life at least. My dad wasn't entirely absent; however, my primary caregiver was my mother. And seeing her navigate the world as a single, divorced woman, who in hindsight, I realize was actually quite young. She was like 30 years old. I mean, gosh I don't know if I could have done that.

Extremely ambitious as a child, Jillian considered herself a leader. Her confidence exuded through the phone as we spoke; yet, I did not find her to be arrogant just poised. The message passed down from her mother, however, spoke to gender roles that favored the institution of marriage for females. Inner turmoil regarding faith and gender expectations riled inside of Jillian and irritation rose in her voice recounting these battling emotions while she spoke:

> There was a disconnect, I felt, between my aspirations and the culture I grew up in because I grew up Mormon and so I was told (both by my family, but even more so by the church) my main purpose in life as a woman was to get ready to have children, to take care of my children. That was what I was supposed to do as a woman, and I wanted to do that, but I also wanted to do other things.

A turning point in her life occurred at the college of Brigham Young University (BYU) when she left the Mormon faith around 2005. I was intrigued by the power religion had on Jillian's life and identity and I could relate to the similar power Catholicism had on me when I was grappling with identity myself as a young adult. For reasons I cannot explain, I failed to consider the role that religion might play in the lives of the women of my study. I began to ponder the possible influential encounters that other participants' might experience with religion contributing to their perceptions of identity or possible conflicted emotions surrounding identity linked to religion.

In 2005, Jillian transferred to California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo. Studying gender, international development, and economics, she earned her

Bachelor of Science degree in economics. These studies would bring her to the University of California London (UCL) and New York University (NYU) for two separate Master's Degrees: Gender Studies and Data Science. Captivated by other peoples' experiences and "stories," in 2011, Jillian started working as a freelance consultant with Amnesty International. Using mixed-methods research as a gender specialist, her life's work evolved into the formation of her company, Global Insight International in New York City.

In this space, she has been able to leverage the activist within herself as a gender, peace and security advisor. Global Insight International works alongside of nonprofit organizations as consultants and researchers to evaluate programs, conduct research, and problem-solve to achieve "sustainable social change" that provides a unique "understanding of lived experience" (About Global Insight, n.d.). With an emphasis on human rights and international development, Jillian's organization strives to stimulate social change in a manner that is keenly aware of gender bias, injustice, and female empowerment.

As she spoke about what it means to be an educator, her thoughts spanned a collection of moments birthed in the classroom (while teaching at Rutgers University) and the many eye-opening narratives that have come forth from lived experiences that belong to her and others whom she has worked with closely. As she sees it, being an educator is part of daily life and constitutes how people interact with one another inciting critical discourse:

> I try basically to create a place where people can ask all sorts of questions and we can delve into that thinking and really understand the underlying reasons why we feel certain ways, believe or behave certain ways. So I think my role as an

> educator is to help people to unravel the dogma and the haziness that is the world under a patriarchal system, basically.

Jillian acknowledged that she can be somewhat provocative when teaching, facilitating conversations, or engaging in dialogue in an effort to extend the boundaries of one's thinking. Her laughter echoed as she softened while expressing her passion for getting at the underbelly of what motivates people and their behaviors in society.

For example, Jillian came alive when telling a story of a recent discussion that took place in her Gender Studies class that centered on internal oppression. A male student brought up the topic of sexual consent while the class was discussing the fallout of a rape culture in any society. He and the class became entangled with worry and retrospect regarding the notion of consent and how potentially hollow it could be if women were "not totally connected to themselves." As Jillian recollected:

> It really brought up a larger question to explore in the class, which I think is really interesting. And then it's these moments that I really like . . . Where it's a question of how much consent can a woman give, if she is divorced from her own needs and feelings and voice by a patriarchal system?

These moments of lasting quandary and question that spark people to see the world in a new way are what fuel Jillian. "I like to ask them these questions to kind of push their buttons and then get the students to think about things and really wrap their minds, completely, kind of like torque their minds around these questions." The significance of storytelling seemed to surface again and again when we chatted. Her primary work as CEO of Global Insight International consists of gathering data of various sorts (i.e., mixed methods, interviews, etc.) of organizations and people to evaluate the programs of nonprofit organizations. In this work, she exhumes from people stories of "programmatic

impact in a very human-centered way." Here, too, she sees the educator in herself.

Before embarking on her social action life journey, Jillian remembers feeling naïve about her expectations. Unable to obtain a well-paying job with a nonprofit organization doing meaningful social action work frustrated her endlessly. I could hear the disappointment in her voice as she explained the need to prove her "professional legitimacy," however; she was given no opportunity to do so. In her view, the lack of funds to sustain social action projects, low paying jobs, and burnout was keeping many Millennials at bay who desired to be change agents. Thus the beginnings of her company, Global Insight International.

Feminist Dialogue is a nonprofit organization that she also founded, which flourished from informal brunches that started in her Washington, D.C. home around 2009 with friends and women who had similar passions. Looking for a way to bring females together to engage in critical discourse regarding ways to break the social barriers they faced, the meetings became a place for women to challenge, untangle, and debate progressive topics. Becoming an official organization in 2014 when Jillian moved to New York City, the community of feminists and the traveling-brunch sessions expanded.

Dubbed, *The Hive*, the monthly brunch is open to men and women and held in a member's home with a preselected topic of discussion. Typically, an expert in the community on the chosen topic co-facilitates the conversation with Jillian on matters ranging from "race, individualism vs. communalism, abortion and reproductive justice, religion, dating, parenthood," and other topical matters. The group "seek[s] diversity in perspective, experience, and thought, mindful that equality is dependent on

empowerment through knowledge sharing, listening, and addressing difficult subjects with civility" (About Feminist Dialogue; J. Foster, personal communication, March 23 and April 2, 2015).

"My social action," Jillian opined, "is built around bringing people together to have discussions and build community where there isn't one." Whether hashing out her thoughts regarding women's rights, feminism, or equality, she explores the duplicity that often creates barriers in society that can be baffling. At times, she has wondered if she was the only one recognizing and struggling to make sense of and dismantle societal barriers. It has been helpful to create a space, such as Feminist Dialogue, where others can come together to discuss issues that feel oppressive. Bringing people together has offered the opportunity to see that others have similar questions and doubts about the power structures in place in society. Jillian stated, that the social action of facilitating Feminist Dialogue allows people to "work together" and "learn and share ways to break down these barriers and then also build a community together where we can learn and share and do things together." Stimulating topics of race, the intersection of gender, sexuality, and economics are all fair game and up for debate, dissection, and interpretation during the brunches.

Together we tried to trace the route that led Jillian to social action engagement and her interest in deconstructing gender roles, feminist perspective, race, and equality. As time passed, she became more and more animated throughout our interviews. The once blunt and guarded Jillian had become an impassioned and excitable individual. I felt myself growing more enthusiastic at the prospect of what she might share. "I'm interested in gender and the way we use gender as an othering tool and also the way that we use

gender to build identities and how that informs the way that we behave." Clearly stated, her driving force for engaging in social action boiled down to this: recollections of her mother struggling as a single parent, her own life experiences, and the barriers she feels she has been up against as a woman.

> I'm interested in women marginalization and intersection. I'm particularly interested in the intersection of gender, women in particular, and then economic inequality and racial inequality, the mix of those items. So the way that economic inequality and racial inequality interact with a woman being a woman and what that is and the barriers that creates.

A concerted effort to highlight the connection between masculinity, conflict, violence, and identity also shown through when we were uncovering what prompted Jillian to pursue social action change:

> I'm also very interested in the way that masculinity is involved in conflict, and identity construction, and a drive towards violence. Like, how we have constructed masculinity as dependent on violence and how it doesn't necessarily have to be that way. But we have constructed it that way and so we behave certain ways around that construction.

She proclaimed that being an agent of social change was about "conscious raising." Always a curious person, one interested in patterns of people and cultures, Jillian recognizes that she enjoys "connecting the dots" to try and make sense of the world and her experiences.

Critical in all of her roles (e.g., CEO, adjunct instructor, researcher, facilitator of conversations) is the knowing that the world is a better place when people, particularly women, are given a voice and advocate for themselves and others. She shared with the utmost commitment that when women are given a voice, marginalized people are given a voice. Women have the power to harness solidarity and bring communities together,

Jillian professed:

> Any marginalized community is often easy to organize into an actual community because they need one another. They need one another to gain access to resources and voice. That's how you break down the marginalization to some degree. It's like saying, 'Well we're in it . . .' First, we talk about it and then we do something about it. And whatever they do, they do because they're inspired, because they talked about it together. And they've built that relationship together.

It became increasingly clear that agency—acting on behalf of oppressed individuals—is the cornerstone of her thinking, her work, and her identity. "It's very hard for me to separate the work that I do and me as a person because it just defines me in such a way." I saw a vulnerability growing within Jillian with each word she uttered.

It was difficult for Jillian to choose one most pivotal experience, but she did describe a memorable project that left a lasting impression. A 6-month project came to mind when Global Insight International worked with a nonprofit organization that assisted women of domestic violence. Jillian's role was to listen to the women's lived experiences and ascertain how the nonprofit organization had helped them learn life skills, work skills, and other necessary skills to piece their lives back together. Jillian thoughtfully discussed the meaning she garnered from listening to these women and their ability to overcome tragedy. She was moved by the manner in which these women had been empowered and felt honored to translate their stories back to the nonprofit organization that had assisted them.

Transformation and Summary

Jillian, as a transformed woman, sees the world as complex. She has learned to reconcile the discomfort she sometimes feels due to growing up in a very religious environment. Religion often handed her prepackaged answers—predetermined answers,

with little room for doubt. Yet, when Jillian came to recognize that not all of those answers were aligned to her own values, life became complicated. As an adult, she has found comfort in sitting with that complexity as long as she can continue to examine the knots that entwine, snarl, and tether human experiences in what she calls our "satirical world." Finding comfort in asking for help or answers to her questions has encouraged a humbleness within Jillian: a characteristic that many of the females acknowledged in our interviews:

> I've really grown into a comfort around owning the things I don't know. But what I do know is I know people I can ask for help. And I'm okay with not knowing everything. And that's totally, totally valid to not know everything and you've just got to ask for help. And I've become way more comfortable with that.

Her feminist side has blossomed over the years, "My feminism has definitely gotten more extreme, more radicalized . . . I've become more radical in that I'm much more outspoken." Jillian now tends to exhibit these beliefs in her personal and professional life—an extension of who she is and who she identifies as. Taking a deeper dive into topical issues is a priority to her, and her self-efficacy is well intact:

> My politics around that, around feminism, [and] economic inequality has really grown in intensity. And I think also I've gained a lot of empowerment personally (around starting these organizations) in that I didn't know what I was doing when I started.

The girl who used to want to have all of the right answers has become a woman who is willing to ask others questions and reach out to others for guidance. Still extremely curious, her goals as a catalyst for change are typically organic, birthed by collaborating with others. By examining peoples' life patterns, she is "trying to make sense of the world" and her "own experience in the world as it relates to others." In terms of the role

culture played in her social change work, an undeniable presence of an imbalance regarding women's rights, their roles, and position in society permeated. However, she works diligently as a CEO to flatten the hierarchies that often loom within organizations and become barriers for women trying to advance their careers, life styles, and legitimacy in a world dominated by a hetero-male construct.

Postulating that all feminists should embrace mentoring other women (as she has been mentored herself), Jillian contemplatively paused the conversation to quietly reflect. In this moment of quiet, Jillian realized and expressed an issue that she feels today's social change agents need to consider within the field of feminist thinking:

> I've experienced, and I know that many others have [too], trans-identity rights issues—everything around trans people. I think it's really something that feminism needs to really address and think about. How are we going to include that identity and that experience in our work?

The topic created a perplexing, yet stimulating question. How will feminist groups combine trans-identity into the sometimes women only spaces? While on the topic, I pressed Jillian to extricate her opinion regarding men speaking about women's issues of the times. I wondered how she felt about their male voices (unrelated to trans issues) being part of a feminist conversation:

> I think like anyone who is espousing equality and feminism is great. 'It's like yeah, let's do it, I'm down.' I think there's a really, really fine balance between speaking for people and listening to people and amplifying their voices . . . Because we're acculturated in a patriarchal society, all of us, even well meaning men, can opt to silence women by speaking for them, which is really disempowering. So I think they have to be really careful.

Jillian was kind enough to share her thoughts over the course of two interview sessions. In such time, I saw her slowly surrender her protective, tough exterior and open up the

inner workings of her mind and heart. Her evolution from girl to woman had to endure the somewhat restrictive boundaries of the Mormon faith and its seemingly narrow ideals of what it means to be a woman within the context of the United States. In closing, when discussing how she imagined other people viewing her, she nearly could not even come up with the words. “I can’t speak to how others see me, though I can speak on how I hope they would see me . . . I believe strongly in collaboration.” Whether it was through her teaching, facilitating difficult conversations, or researching lived experiences for nonprofit organizations, Jillian considered this teaming of the minds the essence of who she is as a female educator.

“I see my role as someone who ties all of the pieces together and unifies that around a vision,” she further explained. Conditions of situationality, positionality, and certainly self-efficacy all intermingled, assisting her in finding her own path in life to fulfill and cement her identity as an adult. Forging into professional worlds to establish her own organizations, she let her confidence guide her to acts of agency regarding issues of equality and rights (J. Foster, personal communication, March 23 and April 2, 2015).

Figure 5 further details Jillian’s experiences and social actions. Chapter Five explores these categories and themes in a more distinct fashion, in addition to examining the relationships across themes to other participants of the research study. Through such inquiry, both common and uncommon conditions related to transformation are revealed.

Figure 5. Unit analysis, Jillian Foster: Categories and themes.

Category I: Perceptions of Self and World: Girl

Themes: Context: California, U.S. **Date of Birth:** 1984

Identity: Educated, White, Native-American, female.

Situationality: Oldest child; divorced parents; absent father; lower-middle class (socioeconomic status), strong Mormon influence; felt *weird* to identify as Mormon (felt like the Other). Not enough money to travel.

Positionality: Mormon influence was constraining; suggested women had children. Go to college start family; disconnect between religious culture and aspirations. Started to question faith in college. Left faith.

Self-Efficacy: Extremely ambitious, student leader, skier.

World View: Saw world through eyes of a struggling, single mother. Mormon faith was shaping life's path and worldviews; felt restricted in life choices. World has problems; family saw world as a *scary* place. Dreamed of traveling.

Category II: Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)

Themes: Defining Educator: Daily interactions with people makes one an educator; create a safe place to question the dogma; look for other's motivations and patterns of behavior; unravel the patriarchal system of the world; ask probing questions; facilitate conversations; empower others.

Agency: Instructor of Gender Studies at Rutgers University; CEO and Founder of Global Insight International; Founder of nonprofit, Feminist Dialogue.

Subthemes: Personal Education: Bachelor of Science degree, Economics at California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo, 2007; Master of Science degree, Gender Studies at University of California London (UCL), 2010; Master of Science degree, Data Science at New York University (NYU), 2014.

Being an Educator: Empowering others.

Category III: Social Action, Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Defining Social Action: Creating a community/bringing people together; breaking barriers; learn and share knowledge; exploring feminism, women's rights, and equality; critical discourse. Working with nonprofits.

Context: Instructor of Gender Studies at Rutgers University; CEO and Founder of Global Insight International; Founder of nonprofit, Feminist Dialogue.

Dates of Social Change Engagement: 2009-Present

Self-Efficacy: Established her own company and nonprofit without solid know-how; believed in goals and took the chance.

Agency: Empowers people; teaches students; creates a space for discourse related to social justice and feminist issues, engages in mixed-method research to understand marginalized people and oppressive issues in society (i.e., identity construct, gender issues, violence, masculinity, poverty, and race relations). Builds communities where similarities and differences are recognized. Through her work, collects, analyzes, and tells the stories of people and organizational impact in a very *human-centered* way.

Subthemes: Driving Forces Towards Social Action: Wanting to understand how society uses gender as an *othering* tool (i.e., women marginalization, masculine violence towards women,

economic inequality, racial inequality); desire to break barriers in society for females; working to gain professional legitimacy.

Pivotal Social Action Experience(s): Cannot choose one experience…

Expectations/Goals: Naïve expectations initially; get social action job quickly and make change. Organic, collaborative goals were needed while engaging in social action change.

Lessons Learned: World is a better place when people (particularly women) are given a voice and advocate for themselves and others. When women are given a voice, marginalized people are given a voice. Women have the power to harness solidarity and bring communities together.

Self-Awareness: Craves women only spaces to share stories.

Category IV: Response to Efforts with Feminist Dialogue Nonprofit (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Culture: Recognizes that women unify around a common vision of equality; collaboration is key; build communities that break barriers of race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Gender: Sees the *satirical* world and recognizes the need for women only spaces while welcoming men's opinions. Trans-identity needs should be part of all feminist dialogue. Personally struggled to gain professional legitimacy as a woman. Men should reflect on how they feel, while allowing women to speak on their own behalf. Female unity, solidarity.

Other: Many people are afraid of the Other/marginalized (in the US and abroad); the Other is dangerous. These are feelings of ignorance; not understanding or seeing the context. Collaboration built trust and relationships. Must observe another's perspective; listen to their stories.

Inner-Conflict: Must balance speaking for people, listening to people, and amplifying their voices. Some people are afraid of the Other.

Category V: Perceptions of Self and World: Woman (Praxis)

Themes: Context: Washington, D.C.; currently New York City, NY

Identity: CEO and Founder of Global Insight International; Founder of nonprofit, Feminist Dialogue; and Adjunct Instructor of Gender Studies, Rutgers University. Life experiences have shaped identity; her work defines her.

World View: Complex world but has found comfort with the complexity. Needs to connect the *dots*/the stories to make sense of the world; helps others recognize a unified vision when engaged in social action work. Recognizes disconnect between values and actions at times.

Category VI: Transformation and Life Lessons (Praxis)

Themes: Transformation: Even more curious. Attempts to make sense of her own experiences in the world and how they relate to others across cultures, time, and place. Religion cannot provide all of the answers. More of a realist.

Lessons Learned: Sees importance of solidarity among women. In patriarchal society well-meaning men can disempower women by speaking for them; silencing their voices. There is a need to increase the profile of feminism; more accurate definition, adding diversity, intersectionality, and inclusivity needed. People's stories/experiences are important to understanding. Powerful economic and political forces shape the world.

How Others Might View Her Efforts: Collaborative. One who tries to understand the barriers in life and respects others experiences and stories.

Personal Hopes: Hierarchy and power structures could be flattened. People continue to ask uncomfortable questions; critical discourse.

Figure 5. Combines both the categories and the themes that were delineated from Jillian's narratives and the characteristics or subthemes that were also extracted.

Portrait of Jennifer Irizarry

Consultant, UNICEF, the U.S. Human Rights Network,

and Digital Marketing and Communications for MTV World

(Born 1978; 37 years of age)

For months, I had tried to secure a participant working with UNICEF. I corresponded through telephone and email with various directors to connect with someone in the world of education within the organization. Finally, to the credit of Jennifer, a relationship was forged. She demonstrated complete enthusiasm for the study and clearly had much to say about the role of educators, social action, and gender issues in the United States and around the world. I could tell from our initial email exchanges that Jennifer was going to be full of fire offering honest and raw insights.

Arriving home from work at 8:00 p.m. eastern standard time, it was already dark in the cold of March when we first saw each other. Connecting through video chat, Jennifer fell onto her living room couch as I literally saw the stress of the day fluff off her. Soon her husband popped into the frame and handed her a bottle of beer. She smiled at me, pushed her long hair over her shoulder, and with a tilt of her beer toward the screen (an airborne toast), we were rolling.

Always spirited during each Skype encounter, Jennifer called herself a freelance specialist and a consultant of communications. A self-proclaimed “kid of the 90s” and “educated, White, hipster girl” (as shared during our interviews), she gravitated toward Greenpeace as a child and attempted to be a vegetarian at age 10. Although the vegetarian-life-choice did not stick, Jennifer grew to be a socially conscious adult pivotal

in communicating the goals, mission, and projects of organizations such as UNICEF, the U.S. Human Rights Network, and most recently, MTV World.

The oldest of three children, she described growing up with conservative, southern, republican parents in Raleigh, North Carolina. I noticed the word "republican" brought on a sour face and a slight roll of the eyes whenever she said it. Both parents were born in Germany due to Jennifer's maternal and paternal grandfathers' military careers. Only surface details of Jennifer's once 14-year-old mother escaping a fundamentalist cult to evade being married to a 35-year-old man were shared with me:

> My mother comes from a small town in Tennessee where she actually was raised in what, for lack of a better word, was a Fundamentalist Religious Cult, where she experienced a lot of brainwashing and abuse . . .

I wanted to probe and hear more about the story—I could not help but to be intrigued by the backstory of her mother—but I resisted the urge and centered my focus back on Jennifer.

As the roots of her middle-class family history continued to be revealed, tension felt as a girl surrounding her upbringing were now recognized as a very skewed perception of the reality of her situation and position. Although Jennifer went to some of the "best public schools," she always felt her family was at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum in the affluent communities where they lived.

> My parents, we lived in fairly middle class neighborhoods, and I feel like or even upper middleclass neighborhoods, I always went to the best public schools, which tend to be the richer areas of the city, right. So I felt like compared to other people, I never had enough or I was somehow deprived, which is interesting because I would later go on to reverse that feeling when I got more perspective.

Eventually, as Jennifer grew older and could understand the social dominance factors surrounding her, she acknowledged the feeling of *being without* when she actually had plenty. Being situated among the affluent, yet not having the same social, cultural, and economic capital her neighbors and peers had distorted her view of the continuum of wealth as a young girl.

Drilling down, we ventured into the waters of the ethnicity, race, and heritage of her family. Jennifer's Puerto Rican surname passed on from her father later caused inner-turmoil when it brought negative attention from her school peers. White skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes served as a contradiction to her ethnic roots, as others saw her. "I always felt like an outsider living in the south under a Hispanic surname," she said while also expressing that she never quite fit in as an adolescent. An inner-conflict linked to culture and race was exacerbated after returning to the south after a short 2-year move to Delaware. Delaware (a small state roughly 400 miles north) offered her a vastly different and diverse experience than her posh neighborhood in North Carolina. Being among diversity, she blossomed in her acceptance of her own Hispanic ethnicity and forged friendships with a culturally diverse group of friends. It was not until returning home to North Carolina that she experienced firsthand explicit racial discrimination:

> My most positive years were the two years that I lived in Dover, Delaware. I was maybe in sixth grade. I had a great teacher who impacted me a lot. And I think that was as far north as I've ever lived. So I could really feel the difference, because I remember moving back south after that experience and all of a sudden, I didn't have any friends of color anymore. It wasn't socially acceptable to have them.

Peers started to warn her against being friends with African American students and they used the "N" word with great zealous. I could see the proverbial lump in Jennifer's throat

as she told me these stories. I, too, felt disgusted by the encouragement to shun friends based on the color of their skin. I could also read the complexity of the situation emanating from her as she wriggled, recalling the same prejudice friends accepting her as a White, Hispanic girl. Jennifer was angry and ready to protest at the mere recollection of these memories when the lines of segregation were being drawn.

Jennifer remained animated, wired, as we opened the gate on other social issues such as poverty, human rights, and environmental awareness. Each played out in her life as a child and as an adult. Gender roles and stereotypes surfaced close to home for Jennifer as a young girl. In her view, she grew up in a sexist household and often saw her older brother reaping "the lion's share of resources." Even as a child, Jennifer started to internalize consumer trajectories—factory farming, the ecology of the planet, and its environmental impact on the animals. At a young age, she was mindful of the carbon footprint she was leaving behind.

Her growing awareness of the biased imbalance of social and economic inequalities in our country also struck her when sharing a poignant story of a time she visited Washington, D.C., as a child. Along with her family and friends of the family she recounted being at a park for a picnic lunch one afternoon when the daughter of her parents' friends' started to throw a tantrum over an ice cream cone. Under the hot sun, the young girl, "being a little brat," threw her ice cream cone down on the ground to melt between the blades of green grass. Simultaneously, Jennifer was taking in the scene of a homeless woman across the way rummaging through a garbage can for food. Jennifer remembered becoming angry—angry at the girl's blatant disregard for food, a treat, a comfort. Overcome, Jennifer lashed out and squeezed ketchup packets onto the little

girl's head. This, of course, was the response of a socially aware individual in the making, though her parents were mortified by her behavior. Jennifer and I both laughed, "You go!" I blurted out, as if spurring her on. I could not believe her tenaciousness even as a child.

As the progression goes, the college years and career came to the forefront of our interviews. Jennifer's parents were proponents of her getting a college education and they too, always strived for more than what they had when growing up. While pursuing her Bachelor of Art degree in Art History at the State University of New York College at Purchase, Jennifer became pregnant with her first child at the age of 21. Taking 7 years to complete her degree, the experience left her with profound and outspoken opinions regarding the shortcomings of women's reproductive health and neonatal care in the United States.

"There is tremendous pressure on women to work, provide for, and raise their children with very little assistance," she stated. "Every mother of young children is one man away from poverty or homelessness." Jennifer explained that in other words, if a father of children leaves a mother, the woman is vulnerable due to the lack of social supports currently in place in our country. What women are supposed to *be* and the social policies that *support* them are incongruent, especially for women of color, she summarized. Jennifer divulged her interest in advocating for women's healthcare and neonatal care, guiding and helping other women navigate the medical system that she views as a "violation of women's rights" here in America, based on the number of neonatal death's in our country.

While scooting to the edge of the couch cushion, Jennifer raised an eyebrow: "I am not by any stretch of the imagination living some liberated feminist dream, not at all. I am totally hustling to get by because I have to manage all of these things [as a mother, a wife, and professional]." Although her social change ideals are entrenched in feminist principles, I could tell it was difficult at times for her to live by those feminist standards. A woman cannot shirk off the responsibilities that often fall on her once she becomes a mother and/or wife, she said in so many words:

> I absolutely feel that there is a—I don't want to call it disadvantage, because motherhood is the greatest gift; it's been such a spiritual journey for me—but at the same time, it makes real life really freaking hard. It stacks the deck against you, frankly.

I could sense that Jennifer had such love for her children, and I even had the opportunity to watch her interact with her youngest daughter at times during our interviews when she waddled into the room. However, Jennifer both implied and proclaimed at various times that being a mother in today's world meant giving up a portion of one's self or never fully realizing one's full potential:

> I kind of feel like I haven't accomplished very much because I am a fragmented person. I feel like mothers are fragmented people. They are constantly torn in as many different directions as they have children, and then their work, and then their husband, and then their families. That whole like care-taking thing? That is some real shit, I got to tell you. It really is. So the flipside to that is like, 'Wow, if I was born a man I would be freaking successful right now.' I think I would be, you know.

I found myself thinking that her statement was both brave and could be true for many women who become partners, mothers, and professionals. I could relate to the idea of feeling torn as a professional and partner myself. Is being torn the same as being fragmented? I wonder if being fragmented implies that one is not intact or in touch with

the whole of who they are or who they were meant to be. Can one change their *position* in the world by changing their *perspective*?

Based on all of Jennifer's experiences, the gravitas to engage as an agent of social change continued to swell within her and her outreach led her to the inner city of New York. Considering herself a human rights educator for over a decade, Jennifer shared her experience teaching in the New York City. While getting her first graduate degree at Mercy College in bilingual education, she taught for 3 years in the New York City Fellows Program in the Bronx from 2003-2005. This experience left her feeling unprepared to teach and disheartened about public education and the general lack of resources provided to inner city schools, teachers, and students.

Referencing her teacher preparation as a "magical certificate" granted before really understanding how to teach, Jennifer quickly became frustrated and unable to handle the emotional challenges her students were burdened with. Student issues as daunting as pregnancy by rape, living in homeless shelters, mothers addicted to crack, and domestic violence all flowed into the classroom and lay at Jennifer's feet. Confronted in this way by the realities of her students' lives propelled Jennifer to broaden her exploration of education, human rights, and social justice.

"There is a big difference between education and schooling," she commented, clarifying that the act of learning (education) is vital but the system of education (schooling) is not doing children justice. "Most teachers are not the exalted teachers who bring out the best in you. And I think that the ones that are able to do that [under] the constraints that they work in, are pretty much miracle workers." Educators are clearly respected in her eyes, although she feared that she might have failed the students in her

own classes due to a lack in teacher preparation (with the Fellows Program) before being put in the classroom. I could sense how much this bothered her and the weight of letting any child down hung heavy in the air.

When I asked how she saw herself as an educator currently, Jennifer recognized that formal teaching is like a "spiritual calling." Although she no longer teaches in the traditional sense (i.e., in a classroom every day), she recognizes that educating others takes many forms. Personally, she sees herself as a mentor to others. Seeing the entire world as an opportunity to teach and learn. She candidly stated, "As you broaden the definition of education, anyone that I have a relationship with in some way—and vice versa—and every human being on the planet is an opportunity for me to learn from and teach." This represented a shared perspective I started to find across all of the interviews with the educators of my study.

Attending Northeastern University in the Boston area in 2013, Jennifer earned her second Master's degree in Nonprofit Management. As a freelance consultant she spread her wings through branding and messaging with a variety of human rights campaigns, organizations, and causes. Her ideas regarding the meaning of social action boils down to a few things: awareness, empathy, and feeling connected to other people and places. "The code of ethics by which you live your life is also a form of action that can be influential to other people." Social action personifies both personal and public choices and they can be explicit or subtle. A political component of social action has started to surface in Jennifer's life. Former feelings of being powerless and dejected shift as she acknowledges that taking part on a political front might translate into being able to

change the very social systems that she finds binding (e.g., the school system, women's health, and human rights).

Concentrating on her current endeavors and work, Jennifer outlined the aims of the present social action project she is engaged in with TeachUNICEF, The Global Action Project. The project will examine the Sahel region of Africa as a case study to explore issues of "malnutrition and food security in a global context" and then invite local New York City students (fourth-eighth grade classrooms) to participate in a pilot program to learn about humanitarian efforts. Locating Sahel geographically, Jennifer shared:

> It's the topographical region in between the Sahara Desert to the north and the further, and the fertile, more jungle-like aspects of the African continent to the south. So it's this dry buffer zone between desert and jungle basically.

As noted on UNICEF's website under Jennifer's guidance:

> After learning about the impact of the crisis on children, students assume the roles of local villagers and work in small groups to analyze and discuss problems and determine solutions. With limited time and funding, how will they choose to allocate resources in order to help the children of their village? (Irizarry, 2015)

The pilot will help in creating future workshops for students to understand a "universal struggle" and "overcome apathy," Jennifer explained during our conversations. She will likely be reentering the New York City classrooms to teach the workshops to teachers and students in the spring or fall of 2015.

As she contemplated the work she is doing with TeachUNICEF—working with school aged children in the Unites States to raise the level of consciousness regarding African malnutrition and food security—she expressed her own need to reconcile or justify the attention she pays on oppression abroad rather than here in the United States.

Feelings of guilt flooded her as she shared her worry that some of the New York City teachers she will be working with might project the opinion of, “We don't want to shove your development *porn* down our kids’ throats. We want them to have a multidisciplinary view or a multidimensional view of the developing world. We don't want to perpetuate this White savior complex.” A concern Jennifer has involves people putting her in a category of accepting that Brown and Black children need to be saved by White people. Jennifer takes this position and recognizes that she may have to fight to avoid this type of labeling. She hopes her work is viewed as a means to help children and adults understand that a universal struggle exists for humankind:

> I do really feel like for a lot of reasons you can apply human rights framework to any situation in any place, in any time, in any profession. And you don't have to be an activist and you don't have to be an educator . . . I think that there's this really interesting thing that happens when you start reading about human rights where you put your context in a larger global struggle and you are able to feel empathy for others, at the same time, they are able to understand your own life in a more nuanced and multi-dimensional way.

In conjunction with this work, Jennifer has taken on an assignment with MTV World and the documentary series called Rebel Music. Noted on their website MTV U, the series:

> . . . examine[s] the lives of young people using art and music to spark change around the world. . . Each episode of Rebel Music highlights a different country grappling with social injustice, from the revolution in Egypt, to sexual oppression in India, and to a Mexican drug harbor struggling to reinvent itself as a cultural haven. (MTV, 2013)

Jennifer will be involved in the communications/media relations’ aspect of the series stretching her change agent wings wider across the globe.

Transformation and Summary

Elements of context, situationality, positionality, all started to funnel into Jennifer's perceptions of self in the world. How she saw herself and others then fueled her belief that she could coordinate her efforts to elicit change. This self-efficacy was then converted into agency and praxis as she matured; as evidenced when she discussed her ventures into the freelance, consulting world:

> Well, I just knew that I would be able to do it if I got the chance. And that's sort of how I have rolled and that has given me, I think, a pretty solid level of confidence in my own self-abilities. But also, I want to help people. So I try to share whatever it is that I've learned or my experiences with whoever wants to hear it.

When we approached the subject of personal change and transformation during our interviews, Jennifer came to realizations about her connections to her Hispanic heritage that did not surface when she was a child. The topic that once brought Jennifer unwanted attention is now a source of pride for her as an adult. By engaging with diverse communities over the years, she has come to embrace her ethnic roots and identify with them as a legacy worth preserving. "I have a shared legacy with people of not only Puerto Rican decent but I actually feel like a sharing of political legacy; like a sharing of common struggle against other people's human experience of oppression."

Challenges such as intergenerational violence and oppression were acknowledged as elements of her own family's journey over the years. The girl who once saw herself as different and on the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum now situates that understanding as part of the pressures amplified by growing up in very affluent communities. Now, after witnessing true oppression and poverty through her activism as an adult, Jennifer sees her childhood as being one of privilege.

When she initially approached social change, admittedly, she was very idealistic. In her younger years, she believed that simple gestures such as buying certain products or changing a habit could reap world change. Admittedly, I was a bit surprised to hear Jennifer call herself an "eternal optimist" while also confessing that she is less optimistic as an adult. She says, "Things are much more nuanced than that and I'm a lot more critical of my own *tribe* in certain ways." Keenly aware of the White power structures at play in society, she grapples with both the intended and unintended oppression that cascades over societies. However, she says that she now applies the same critical and analytical lens to situations.

For instance, both liberal and conservatives ideals are acknowledged and pondered. She questions the world more as an adult and does not give in to the rhetoric that often breeds popular opinion rather than critical analysis. The ability to be far more empathetic to other people's struggles resides within her, she explained as she began winding down. When she would once quickly pass judgment regarding how societies, institutions, businesses, or organizations operate in the context of the world, she now tries to understand the "systemic forces" and "motivations" of their actions. Considering multiple perspectives has become essential.

Final thoughts regarding social change encompassed the importance of time and patience. Efforts to shift a societal paradigm require time:

> You realize that real change takes hard work and nothing happens overnight. And if it does, it's really not real. I just feel like I am much more realistic about my expectations for everything, for people, for the world, for social causes, for my professional life, for my family.

She hopes that whatever her path turns out to be in life that she is thought of as a creative and ethical person; one who considers how her actions will affect others. Considering her whole circumference of being, the scope of who she is and what matters most to her as a female educator acting as a catalyst for social change, Jennifer quietly looked up at me and said, "[It's] how you relate to individuals."

Figure 6 presents more details regarding Jennifer's experiences and social actions. Chapter Five explores these categories and themes in a more distinct fashion, in addition to examining the relationships across themes to other participants of the research study. Through such inquiry, both common and uncommon conditions related to transformation are revealed.

Figure 6. Unit analysis, Jennifer Irizarry: Categories and themes.

Category I: Perceptions of Self and World: Girl

Themes: Context: North Carolina, U.S. **Date of Birth:** 1978

Identity: Educated, White, Puerto Rican-American, *hipster*, female. Identified with being White. Child of the 1990s; environmentalist and vegetarian.

Situationality: Oldest child; southern, conservative, republican parents; married parents; *sexist* household/favoritism towards males; physically aggressive father; middle-upper class (socioeconomic status); Latino surname made her feel like *outsider*. Mother escaped fundamentalist religious cult as a child.

Positionality: Lived in middle-upper class communities and attended best public schools; felt *poor* as child living among much wealthy families. Self-conscious of last name and socioeconomic status. Looking White helped her fit in among peers and make friends.

Self-Efficacy: Calm, well-behaved, strong opinions on social justice and environmental issues. Believed she could impact world through consumer choices (e.g., being vegetarian and advocating for green peace).

World View: Saw racism, sexism, and classism in world; respect and power afforded to White, wealthy, males. Idealistic.

Category II: Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)

Themes: Defining Educator: It is a spiritual calling; a complex job. Educator helps others uncover gifts and develop character. Anti-school, pro-education. Any relationship with another is an opportunity to teach and learn; we are all educators and learners.

Agency: Taught in NY City Fellows Program; multiple grades and subjects. Teaches and develops educational programs with TeachUNICEF and MTV World. Advocates for women's rights and health care. Homeschooled children for period of time.

Subthemes: Personal Education: Bachelor of Art degree, History at State University of New York College Purchase, 2003; Master of Art degree, Bilingual Education at Mercy College, 2005; Master of Art degree, Nonprofit Management at Northeastern University (Massachusetts), 2013.

Being an Educator: Saw self as an unprepared, *bad* traditional teacher with *magical* certificate (NY City Fellows Program). Now sees self as mentor to women and advocates for women's rights and health care. Relationships constitute learning; reciprocal.

Category III: Social Action, Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Defining Social Action: Social action starts with awareness and empathy, resulting in a connection to other people and other places. Choices made; personal, political, and economic. Ethics is a form of social action; how one lives life or a way of *being*. Being an *educator* or *activist* is not required. Internalizing others' stories.

Context: Consultant, U.S. Human Rights Network; Consultant, TeachUNICEF; Consultant, MTV World; personal education and activism.

Dates of Social Change Engagement: 2003-Present

Self-Efficacy: Able to re-brand self and work as freelance consultant even when not *qualified*; took chances, pursued interests and proved self. Believed she could accomplish tasks if given the chance.

Agency: Professionally works towards social change because she does not always have the time to volunteer or the money to donate otherwise. Doing anything to help people claim the language and understand legacy of the universal declaration of human rights for their own lives. TeachUNICEF classroom visits and discussions.

Subthemes: **Driving Forces Towards Social Action:** Women's Studies classes; observing economic, social injustices and inequalities. Recognize her privileged childhood. Actually seeing, living, and working with people radically different from self. *Divine* plan.

Pivotal Social Action Experience(s): (Human rights in general) Teach UNICEF.

Expectations/Goals: (Often organic goals resulting from emotional connections with people). TeachUNICEF uses the Sahel Region of Africa as case study to look at malnutrition and food security in a global context. Help students make connections between immediate experiences and the global realities; situate their own experience within a global context.

Lessons Learned: By understanding experiences of others, children understand own life in nuanced and multidimensional way. Children doing human rights work naturally understand.

Self-Awareness: Registered own level of privilege growing up. Some people question why she is focused on malnutrition in Africa instead of New York City. Worried about perpetuating a *White savior complex*.

Category IV: Response to Efforts- General (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Culture: Recognizes the impact of intergenerational violence and oppression tied to oppressed people; feels connected through Latino ethnicity. Views US culture as neglecting well-being of women. White privilege does exist. Must respect others' traditions and needs.

Gender: Women's healthcare is violation of human rights in US. Sees motherhood as a *gift/spiritual journey* but recognizes that mothers are overburdened in society; double standard for men and women. Female unity, solidarity.

Other: Some New York City teachers may put her in category of accepting idea that Brown and Black people are to be *saved* by White people. Being a woman feels like being the *other* in U.S.: double standards, inequalities in work force wages, high neonatal rates, large number of C-section procedures, poor women's healthcare. There is a need to advocate for all oppressed peoples. Must

observe another's perspective; listen to their stories.

Inner-Conflict: Mothers are *fragmented* people; pulled in many directions. Feels she has not met full potential due to the demands put on mothers; *deck stacked* against women, women assume more responsibilities than men. White privilege. *White savior complex*.

Category V: Perceptions of Self and World: Woman (Praxis)

Themes: Context: New York City, NY

Identity: Consultant, U.S. Human Rights Network; Consultant, TeachUNICEF; and Consultant, MTV World. Mother, feminist, nurturer, volunteer, activist. Role model and mentor to other women. Only recently feels *grown up*. Embraces Puerto-Rican legacy. Confident. Social action speaks to who she is; identity.

World View: Recognizes that intergenerational violence, oppression, and social power dominance are very real. Women are in social and economic jeopardy in US and elsewhere. Social power maintains oppression.

Category VI: Transformation and Life Lessons (Praxis)

Themes: Transformation: No longer believes the rhetoric; does own research and reading on issues; more analytical (critical of her own *tribe)*. Realistic about expectations. Realizes importance of politics in decisions made; wants to become more involved. More compassionate and empathetic. Feels a common struggle with oppressed people; has embraced Latino heritage.

Lessons Learned: Tries to understand others' behaviors and decisions as linked to motivations. One person can make a change; make the world better. She has the strength, power, and ability to stand up for self and communicate; feels very *lucky*.

How Others Might View Her Efforts: An advocate for all human rights, ethical and creative.

Personal Hopes: The human rights framework is applied to all situations, in all places, all the time, in all professions.

Figure 6. Combines both the categories and the themes that were delineated from Jennifer's narratives and the characteristics or subthemes that were also extracted.

Portrait of *Madison*

Co-Developer of *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative,* Dean and Professor of Psychology

(Born 1974; 41 years of age)

In the spring of 2014, I was looking for volunteer opportunities for myself when I came across the Center for Global Initiatives. I called to ask more about the organization and how it worked with underserved communities around the world. Expecting to get an operator or a program coordinator on the other end of the line, I was surprised to realize I was actually speaking with the founder himself. He offered his time and experience during that conversation in such a way that it made a lasting impression on me. Unprepared for such a long and lofty exchange, I scribbled notes on the back of various papers strewed across my desk and circled the name of a woman "doing great work in Africa," as he put it. He adamantly suggested I contact her—*Madison*. Madison's name and the institutions and organizations mentioned during our interviews are referred to using pseudonyms, which I created per her request. However, the countries in which Madison has carried out her work in Africa are disclosed. As a stranger, I called Madison and introduced myself, introduced my study, and explained the winding path that had led me to her.

Madison and I met for our interviews via Skype; however, she never turned on the video feature during our encounters. Initially, I found this quite interesting; as if by her own design, a wall of protection was thoughtfully placed between the two of us. Each time she offered a reason not to turn on the camera: she felt she "looked like a mess" and "just came in from an overdue flight," or "the room was dark and she figured I would not

be able to see her." I did not press the issue. To me, the contents of our conversations would likely far outweigh the lack of video streaming. Looking back, I am so grateful for continuing with our interview sessions as they were because I think it allowed Madison to share a vulnerable side of herself and intimate details of her life she may not have otherwise felt comfortable sharing if we were looking at each other eye to eye.

In the end, her willingness to open up provided a visual that extended across the years of her life, the places she has been, and the things she has seen with total humility and resiliency. A professor of psychology and dean of programs at a non-for-profit, accredited institution for learning in the Midwest region of the United States, Madison has dedicated her life to developing international human capacity through trauma research and training in a metropolitan area here in the United States and in Rwanda and Zambia, Africa.

When asked about how she saw herself in the world as a young girl, in her own words, she classified her childhood as "bizarre." Born into a White, seemingly upper-middle class family, she grew up in Southern California and moved to Miami, Florida when she was 14 years old:

> I had a challenged background so I actually just feel like when you ask a question for me like that, I go back to a place of just saying, I almost was a bit of a zombie because I was living day to day and I think more in survival [mode] than anything else.

Madison never divulged the full details of her upbringing and what constituted "a challenged background," but she did crack the door on some family dynamics she endured as a young girl. I could sense the topic was delicate and I struggled to avoid

overstepping my bounds as a researcher. I did not want to appear insensitive to her need for privacy; yet, I felt an obligation to try to gently investigate her inner thoughts. As the minutes began to tick away, Madison's voice loosened and we found a cadence in our conversation. A subtle level of trust seemed to grow with each word exchanged.

Madison made a submission, while describing her family and her inability to *see* herself (position herself), in the world as a girl or as she might become as an adult:

> In retrospect, I don't think I had the opportunity or the breathing room to be able to see about who I would be next, and I didn't have role models to really show me who or what I could become. And the things that my family valued were things that were superficial.

She remembered her parents driving a Maserati and living lavishly, while bouncing checks meant to pay for school field trips. Her embarrassment over these instances seems to have continued into adulthood. Secretly, her family was in financial debt and ruin. The family "disbanded," she explained, when she was 15 years old. Her father simply left and her mother became overwhelmed. A seesaw between sadness and matter-of-factness settled in her throat as she handed these details over to me. Living on her own and babysitting for room and board, Madison joined a youth group as a teenager that literally changed the trajectory of her life.

A bifurcation in the perspective of Madison's early independence seemed painful as she spoke about the details. Madison divulged that her mother recounts the experience as Madison "wanting independence," while Madison internalized the experience as being "left behind." With no goals in mind for their daughter and little guidance offered, Madison's biological parents relinquished guardianship to a married couple who Madison

had grown quite close to in these formative years. These youth ministers invited Madison to join their family of five children, and her life began to turn around:

> I think that changed my life in so many ways. They were both educated. They both had gone to college, whereas I am first generation college-bound, so I started to see the world in a very different way—that I had potential to be something that had value. And then I started to have a place in a network of social people that made me feel safe. I think that changed my life, actually.

For the first time in her existence, Madison felt she had value and potential as an individual. The power of this family taking her in was palpable. Suddenly, the entire context of her life story—her situation, her position in the world, her self-efficacy and identity—took a detour and set her on a path to become the woman she is today. The experiences supplanted by the youth ministers and their family cannot replace those of her biological family, those experiences will forever be a part of who she is and her identity; however, Madison's life path was forever altered.

By virtue of feeling supported social-emotionally, Madison's guardians encouraged her to go to college. The little girl who once was without a role model went on to earn a Bachelor of Art degree at Boston University in Psychology and Statistics, and then a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the California School of Professional Psychology in 2002. Working with the juvenile court system as an expert in the field, she conducted forensic assessments and testimonies for the justice system and child protective services. In conjunction to running a private forensic practice, she now writes and speaks on matters of trauma, mental health, and delinquency. Serving as a professor of psychology, in 2013 her career path led to her being the Executive Director of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Division at an institution of higher learning and most recently becoming the Dean.

While exploring the inner-workings of the mind and the lasting impressions of trauma in the field of psychology, Madison paved new ways of learning for the budding psychologists in her program. Yearning for more engaging and authentic experiences for psychology students, Madison co-founded the, *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative*. Her social action work flourished in 2009 by way of taking the students from her academic institution to Rwanda, Africa. There, in an effort to help the Rwandan teachers understand trauma to better connect, support, and teach young children, Madison herself admits to undergoing a personal change. At the present, Madison has established the *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative* in Zambia, as well.

Madison shared that at the onset of the initiative, a group of American lecturers, psychologists, childcare workers, teachers, and physical and mental health workers came together in the form of focus groups to share their thoughts regarding what the trauma curriculum should include. She and the task force of American psychology students then created and designed what would constitute the 10 modules of the trauma curriculum to be delivered to African teachers. A thoughtful curriculum was mapped out to aid the Rwandan teachers in understanding their young students. Yet, Madison was quickly humbled upon her arrival when she realized the most important voices were inadvertently left out of the initial curriculum design—the voices of the Rwandan teachers. The very culture and lived experiences of the Rwandans needed to become part of the planning process. Madison realized that rebuilding the trauma modules would require the collaboration and insight of the Rwandans who actually experienced the trauma of the 1994 genocide between the Tutsi and Hutu people.

Imagine how difficult it must have been to help the Rwandans recognize trauma in the children they taught (and in themselves) when the word for *trauma* did not even exist within their own language. It was there in Rwanda that Madison observed firsthand such levels of complex trauma and extreme poverty for the first time. Plagued by death, starvation, and grief, she witnessed that healing through storytelling had the power to become a cultural catharsis for the Rwandans.

This facilitated Madison's understanding that she needed to adapt to their needs and learn from the Rwandan teachers—not the other way around. So, the modules were scrapped and Madison asked the Rwandan teachers and health care workers to assist in devising a new curriculum for teachers. By embracing her own feelings, acknowledging an element of self-doubt, and building trust and rapport with the Rwandans, Madison felt she could affect change. New modules were created and Master Rwandan Trainers began passing on their knowledge regarding trauma to other teachers in nearby schools.

This first experience in Rwanda sparked a new teaching approach for Madison regarding how she was engaging her psychology students back in the United States:

> I thought, 'How profound would it be if I could bring [American psychology] students with me to Rwanda to work on the *Teaching Through Trauma Training Initiative* with me and be able to see their transformation in the same way that I was transformed the first time that I went to Rwanda?'

So it came to pass that Madison would return to Rwanda, time and time again, but now with a small team of psychology students assisting in training and fostering relationships with the Rwandan teachers. Currently, 32 different schools in the District of Rulindo embrace the trauma curriculum and they have managed to sustain the work through a train-the-trainer model for over six years. Trauma is now explored through didactic

(instructional) means, fieldwork, and telemedicine (medical information exchanged from one site to another through electronic communication). Key components of learning include: understanding the impact of Rwandan trauma on Rwandans (genocide, community, mind, body, behavior, and academics); neutralizing trauma; spirituality; risk; resiliency; interventions; and teaching practice.

As Madison parsed out what it means to her to be an educator, she initially shared thoughts pertaining to the impact her teaching has had on students in the college classroom. Her aspirations to bring the content to life in order to make it accessible to all students, no matter their background, were critical to her:

> It's a huge responsibility. I think an educator is a person who doesn't just have a knowledge base or an expertise but can really bring to life the material in a way that can be ingested by students of all different sorts of backgrounds and learning challenges and learning strengths. I think you have to get to know your students in somewhat of an individual way to know how to bring that content to them. And I believe an educator, for me, is somebody who can really help students to apply it [content and knowledge] so that they can give back in their own unique way to make a difference in the world.

In Madison's view, an educator may take form in a "multitude of ways," from traditional classroom teacher, to modeling practice in a real world setting, or actually impacting the life of another. A true educator reaches far beyond the four walls of a classroom.

The significance of field experiences and seeing firsthand the real life challenges of those in Rwanda, specifically those who have survived genocide, greatly influenced her as an educator. For Madison, the result of those culminating trips to Africa over the years flipped the student-teacher dichotomy on its head. After learning much from the visits, the stories the Rwandans shared, checking her own "agenda" and "ego" at the

door, and listening to the needs of the teachers for the good of their students, Madison came to be every bit as much of a learner as she was an educator.

Always aware that she walks a tenuous line of potentially doing more harm than good if she does not respect the Rwandans' and their culture, she approaches each experience with sensitivity and a willingness to learn. She deliberately creates a space where the African teachers can exercise their own voice and make changes that will best suit the needs of the traumatized children they teach:

> I value education more and the importance of education. I think I no longer see, however, education as being something where you have to get a terminal degree or you have to get a higher degree. I think I learned in those moments that those teachers that are trained in *Teaching Through Trauma* are more knowledgeable and more effective than I could ever be. And I think that taught me about what education is about. It's about the spirit, and the passion, and the commitment that one brings to the work. [It's] not necessarily about how book smart they are and what degree they have. I've learned more from those teachers than probably any teacher in my life.

As we approached the topic of social change, I initiated the conversation by asking Madison what draws her to this work. She took a moment to really absorb the question and sort of scan the contents of her life, "That's a good question," she remarked:

> A lot of my own history and my childhood has probably brought me to this place. And that I feel I was *gifted* by having the guardians that I had, that created the change in my life. I probably see other children, and probably why most of my focus has been on children, as being a huge part of social change and being able to make a difference in the world.

This feeling of being "gifted," a debt that seems to be owed to the world, a sense to pay it forward, started cropping up in other interviews, also.

When trying to uncover what it means to be a change agent, Madison asserted that she felt a responsibility to leave a positive mark on the people or place of action.

> People all too often think it's about them and how they're supposed to be doing something to another to create change. And I guess, I think for a moment that social action is also about taking responsibility and leaving a place that you enter better than it was before.

A respect for the culture of any new place in which one is trying to forge change is an absolute necessity to her. The ability to check one's ego at the door and draw on the knowledge that whatever the social change effort might be, it should be about the spirit of all humankind not any one individual alone.

Madison also touched upon the reciprocity of such work:

> In order to do that, it takes a lot of humbleness and it takes a lot of thinking about what it is that country, for example, or those people need and how you can utilize your skill set but also leverage their skill set and their skills to be able to affect change. And I think that's the part that sometimes all too often we forget, or sometimes our egos get in a way and we don't know what else to do.

Allowing room for the all people to be involved in the decision-making is vital. The social change process can never be completed by the one person, and therefore, no one person can possibly have all the answers.

I turned my focus explicitly toward the role culture and gender played throughout her work in Africa; I was interested in the differences between the countries of Rwanda and Zambia. Establishing *Teaching Through Trauma* in both countries meant Madison had to adjust and become a student of the culture in both of these respective places. The experiences in both countries were similar in that the social change efforts were geared toward teaching African teachers about how trauma impacted children. However, the interventions and strategies used to sift through the social-emotional residue were different in Zambia because they did not experience the genocide of 1994. Madison expressed that Zambia simply did not require the same level of sensitivity in this regard.

Gender roles among the people of Rwanda more aligned to Madison's personal views on female identity than in Zambia. Nonetheless, they were not as liberating as in the United States. The Rwandan culture did extend a high degree of respect for women and oftentimes women held governing roles within Parliament. Appreciation for this aspect of their society seemed to color Madison's voice, as she also shared that many of these women are also mothers. Women are highly valued, yet unspoken rules still exist that dampen their voices. Unable to fully articulate what she called "nuanced" norms, "you have to know your place as well, when you're speaking with men." This was a challenge for her when she had to resist her American urge to speak up, when it was better to not speak at all and let the men take the lead. These moments of suppressed voice were when she most felt like the Other, the outsider.

In Zambia, views on women's rights and gender roles are diametrically opposed to Rwanda's. Here, Madison was challenged to work within communities that viewed men as the leaders, playing very "prominent roles" in society. For instance, tradition dictates that if a husband dies all land rights, property, and belongings are inherited by the deceased husband's family, leaving the widow with nothing (even if the property was hers or her family's at the start). Women essentially become disempowered and thrust into poverty.

Madison shared that more and more, the women of Zambia are realizing some sense of power in leadership roles. This offers her more opportunity to empower the women of the teacher groups she works with while balancing her own voice as the other in Zambia:

> I think they are becoming, as I would say, Americanized in the sense that women are holding a little bit more power and some leadership roles in the country but

> what that means for me as a change agent is I have to be very thoughtful in how I work groups. For example, how I create space for women that are in groups with other men to have voice. How it is that I can assert a sort of power and my own voice as a woman leader of *Teaching Through Trauma*, but doing it in a way that's not threatening to men and not threatening to their culture.

Madison noticed other lasting effects in the differences resulting from historicity in Rwanda and Zambia. These variances primarily concerned power structures that posited light skinned people (in her case, an American, White woman) in different ways, depending on which country she worked. No doubt, Madison experienced (in both countries) the forgone conclusions that many people make pertaining to her a) exterior and b) being an American. Madison expressed that the African people she worked with carried specific ideas about individuals from the United States; an "automatic belief that one is wealthy and powerful." As a fellow American, I confronted this same stereotype while in the Peace Corps in Thailand.

In Zambia (formerly known as Northern Rhodesia) however, a long standing "fear and uncertainty" based on White colonialism still resides there. Trust is a wayward journey—and rightly so—based on experiences and rule by the British Government until 1964. Recounting the years it took Madison to garner trust in Zambia, a better understanding of its impact came to me:

> But somehow after trust, you know three or four years later, I get to the underbelly of what colonization means and how that's impacted their culture and hearing stories about how it's changed even just fundamental things about the foods they eat, the language, how they discipline their children and treat their children.

Trepidation of White people coming into their Zambian homeland and exerting their culture upon them still prevails and lingers in the minds of the Zambians and Madison herself.

In these conversations, her own unpreparedness or naiveté for what it meant to be a White American, and its intersection with power in this place and in this time, was exposed.

In Rwanda, Madison made special note that due to the genocide that many had endured, a real need existed to do "right by the people." There was a commitment to follow through on promises made, as opposed to abandoning efforts before they came to fruition. She has witnessed great disappointment on the part of the Rwandans when nonprofit organizations have been unable to continue their social change efforts and have left the country expectantly and with little progress made in certain areas (i.e., the health field, construction, the economy, agriculture, education, etc.). This added pressure to Madison in that she felt determined to create a lasting trauma curriculum that could be self-sustaining by the Rwandan teachers.

Transformation and Summary

The devastating aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide has been a long road to healing and recovery for its people. Madison came to understand, from a geopolitical and contextual standpoint, that the people of Rwanda felt "left behind" by the United States. She reminds me that this is "President Clinton's largest regret of his life" and I get the feeling she, too, feels part responsible for this misstep in our own nation's history. At times, Madison has questioned the significance of her trauma work in Africa, especially in Rwanda. When the people were left to live with such shattered lives (loss of family,

communities, self, and safety), and had to find a way to meet their most fundamental needs (food, water, shelter, survival), she has wondered where on the priority list her work falls. The Rwandan culture was forever changed and it now included the stories of the genocide. Through the sharing of such stories, Madison has come to believe that her efforts are needed . . . the Rwandan people need her, as much as she needs them.

Madison pointed out that through the independent and collective stories that the Rwandans shared with her, it gave her pause—an opportunity to be reflective through praxis, asking herself how she wanted *to be* in the world as a change agent:

> I felt very blessed in the moment to hear those stories and I wanted to value them by who it is that I would become in that country, and who I would become in that country in the sense of being a change agent. And when I saw myself as a change agent it was more about being a person that helped just be a catalyst for a change, about knowing that it was them [the Rwandans, the Zambians] that was going to sort of reform the country and build human capacity by changing children's lives.

With what felt like a renewed sense of awareness, she explained that once she let go of her ideals about what she was supposed to accomplish and "focused on the human in front of her," she was able to give the Rwandans and Zambians the space they needed to share their stories and build a much-needed trust. In these moments of conversation between Madison and I, I could hear in her voice the *ah-ha* moments reliving themselves in the words, "It was them that was going to sort of reform the country and build human capacity by changing children's lives."

Contemplating each day's work while in Africa, Madison shared her feelings of self-doubt with me. I could feel the vulnerability in these sentiments. Fraught with questions and wondering if she was the right person for this work in these countries, hints

of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis all played out in Madison's reflections:

> I would do a lot of reflection at night with my colleague, just embracing the feelings that I was experiencing as being overwhelmed of being sad, of being like, 'What have I gotten myself into? Am I good enough? Am I going to be able to affect change? Should this be the focus, should it not be the focus? Is this going to be important enough for the country of Rwanda, is it not going to be?' Just all of those—a lot of self-doubting questions—but I think for me, self-doubting questions may push, propel, me to be even better rather. I think for some, self-doubt can actually push them to be in sort of a depressive stance that gets them stagnant. For me, it's the opposite. It allows me to really question myself and prove to myself that I can do it and I can affect change.

The ways in which Madison has transformed were conveyed throughout our interviews. She was extremely self-aware and well spoken. "I'm a changed woman," she told me. "I know what I want in the world and I'm not afraid to say it and I kind of know who I am now and I'm okay if other people don't like that. I'm very different, very, very different." The former mention of being humbled through her social action change and treating the lived experiences of others with honor and sacredness was repeated, again and again. Mention of something I alluded to in former chapters, that there is no exact definition of what it means to be an agent of social change, she expressed, "I think no one's ever a perfect change agent, right? We're always learning and adapting and changing. But I think it allowed me to become more of who it is that I wanted to become, if that makes sense."

Madison's perceptions of the world changed, as an adult. She was self-absorbed as a child and young adult and admittedly, "American-centric," she disclosed. I can relate to these emotions and at times felt swallowed whole by my self-absorption as a young adult. Madison now confided in me that, "I didn't really see the world in all of its

complexities. Not that I do now, but I feel like it's just given me a new insight into the things that one should value." Like most people, values shift and priorities change as we grow into our identities throughout life based on each new experience. In our closing moments together, Madison bequeathed unto me her final thoughts regarding social change:

> Once you hear the stories, and you see the children, and you play with them, and you see the teachers changing their lives, you start to really ingest it and it becomes part of just your soul and how you start to [see the world] . . . I think you're forced to see the world differently. I think if you don't, I think you're just not human, maybe. I don't know.

The efforts of Madison resound throughout many schools in both Rwanda and Zambia.

The African teachers have become essential in the planning and training of the teachers. Grassroots afterschool clubs have also evolved based on the social change efforts, ideas, and implementation to support the needs of the youths and adults living with deep trauma. When thinking about how she has evolved over the years and what might be said of her social action work, Madison went silent for a moment. In an apologetic manner and forewarning me that she was becoming teary-eyed, she sighed through the phone. With a shaky reverberation in her voice, she shared the most genuine and intimate of thoughts, "I hope that somebody just says that I changed their life because people changed my life." In the end, her greatest hope was that she could continue to pay it forward; that one action would lead to another's and then to another's. Today, Madison stands in her new found strength with confidence, no longer the little girl she once saw as meek, scared, and valueless (*Madison*, personal communication, April 2 and April 9, 2015).

Figure 7 details experiences and social actions pertaining to Madison. Chapter Five explores these categories and themes in a more distinct fashion, in addition to examining the relationships across themes to other participants of the research study. Through such inquiry, both common and uncommon conditions related to transformation are revealed.

Figure 7. Unit analysis, *Madison*: Categories and themes.

Category I: Perceptions of Self and World: Girl

Themes: Context: Southern California and Miami, Florida, U.S. **Date of Birth:** 1974

Identity: White, European American, female. Little sense of self-worth or value with biological family; *bizarre* childhood. Quiet, meek, mild. Did not *know* self in the world. Found sense of self-worth at age 15 with new guardians. First generation college bound.

Situationality: Youngest child. Half biological brother; biological family *broken* and *disbanded*. Middle-upper class (socioeconomic status) but secretly in debt; strange, superficial, scary environment. Felt abandoned. Taken in by Youth Ministers, large loving family. Encouraged to go to college. Found her personal value as teen. Felt *gifted/blessed*.

Positionality: Lived in middle-upper class family until 14 years. old; superficial lifestyle. Lacked role models. In *survival mode*; felt like a *zombie*. New guardians later created a safe family environment; encouraging; supportive.

Self-Efficacy: No self-worth until age 15, then saw a promising future and saw she had value; potential.

World View: World was scary and unsafe. Everything was disjointed, uncertain. Worldview changed when taken in by youth ministers. Believed she had potential and realized safety and security in the world.

Category II: Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)

Themes: **Defining Educator**: Being an educator takes place in multitude of ways. Ability to bring content to life in such a way that it can be ingested by students of all backgrounds and with various learning challenges and learning strengths. Collaborative process which requires a reciprocal exchange between learner and teacher. An educator helps students apply learning so they can give back in their own unique way to make a difference in the world. No ego.

Agency: Forensic psychologist; childhood trauma. Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Dean of Psychology in *Midwest*, U.S. Author. Co-founded the, *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative,* as a professor.

Subthemes: **Personal Education**: Bachelor of Art degree, Psychology and Statistics at Boston University; Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at California School of Professional Psychology.

Being an Educator: Sees self as an educator and learner; reciprocal. Collaborative effort. Students have just as much to offer as teacher.

Category III: Social Action, Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: **Defining Social Action**: Leveraging others' skills with your own to effect change. Change is not *always* necessary. Leave a place better than you found it. Help people with their own needs,

not your own. Must be self-reflective and collaborative. No room for ego; be humble. A responsibility. A way of *being*.

Context: Professor/Social Change Agent/Trainer, *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative*; Rwanda and Zambia, Africa.

Dates of Social Change Engagement: 2009-Present

Self-Efficacy: Moments of feeling overwhelmed, sad, self-doubting; wondered if she was *good enough* to effect change. These feelings inspired and motivated her.

Agency: Created trauma curriculum to train African teachers to understand trauma as a means to then teach basic academic school curriculum. Fostered relationships; shared stories of trauma and healing.

Subthemes: **Driving Forces Towards Social Action**: Personal early childhood experiences. Felt *gifted/blessed* in her later childhood years. Working with traumatized, abused, neglected children in the U.S. Stories of Rwandans shared on first trip. Uncle who lived through apartheid in Africa.

Pivotal Social Action Experience(s): Co-founder of ,*Teaching Through Trauma Initiative.*

Expectations/Goals: Originally created trauma modules prior to Rwandan trip. Lack of Rwandan voice and collaboration realized. Modules rewritten *with* Rwandan educators. Established a train-the-trainer module with Teacher Leaders.

Lessons Learned: Complex trauma on a mass scale (genocide, poverty, civil war). People must learn to see world from various perspectives. Personal humility. Significance of hearing other people's stories. Basic fundamentals in life (food, shelter, health). Must include the culture and voice of the region. Consider history of the region (context). Humility. Trust needed.

Self-Awareness: Self-doubt inspires her to persevere. Stories are cathartic; healing.

Category IV: Response to Efforts in Rwanda and Zambia, Africa (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Culture

Rwanda: Recognized the impact of genocide on Rwandans. Storytelling pivotal to culture. Rwandan experiences with many nonprofit groups coming and going; broken promises. Sense of being *left behind* during 1994 genocide (by former U.S. President Clinton administration). White power because of being American (believed to be rich, educated).
Zambia: Recognized the impact of European-colonialism on Zambians. Sense of mistrust toward Whites; social dominance observed. Whites exerted power on Black Africans. White Europeans have influenced food, language, culture, and child discipline.

Gender
Rwanda: Women have hierarchical *place* in society among males (some clear gender roles) but are valued. Women hold positions in parliament (working mothers); power and voice. Madison had to subdue American urge to speak out at times when among males.
Zambia: General mistrust/suspicion of Whites (gender neutral).

Other: Being a White American, she felt *different*; the other. It was *nuanced* and subtle at times; voice was restricted to align with culture and maintain trust and harmony. As a White, American seen as wealthy and powerful, however. Once trust was established, she did not feel like the *other*; people shared their stories of loss. Must observe another's perspective; listen to their stories.

Rwanda: Being White carried pressure to *do right by the people*; social action needed to come to fruition. Avoid letting Rwandans down by leaving unfinished work/avoid broken promises.

Zambia: Being White carried an element of fear in Zambians. Rooted in colonial past, fear that Whites will take over, betray, dominate.

Inner-Conflict: Reconciling an *automatic* power/social dominance given to Whites in certain countries. The different *value* placed on being a woman based on context. Personal complexities during own childhood.

Category V: Perceptions of Self and World: Woman (Praxis)

Themes: Context: Midwest, metropolitan area

Identity: Dean, professor, psychologist, writer, volunteer, social change agent. Humble; must put ego aside. Learns more about self through the eyes of her college students. Strong and bold. Knows self now and what she wants. Not afraid to stand up for ideas and self. Understanding the collective stories of others brings meaning to her life and who she should become.

World View: World is complex. Recognizes true resiliency and what people can overcome. Social change up to a nation's people; *they* will change the country and build capacity by changing children's lives. People's stories changed how she sees the world.

Category VI: Transformation and Life Lessons (Praxis)

Themes: **Transformation**: A *changed human being*; a *different person*. Now understands profound trauma and poverty on mass scale since seeing it in Africa. Values education more but sees it can come from life experiences with others. Rwandan people taught her about life; she became the *learner*. More appreciative of what she has in life. Feels *blessed* to have been trusted with stories of trauma. Less America-centric. Values the basics in life. People's stories changed her soul.

Lessons Learned: To effect change, one must fit into the culture. She realized she needed to stop focusing on the project objectives and focus on the human in front of her (i.e., their stories and experiences). A person can do more harm than good; stories are *sacred gifts* to be treasured. No one is ever a *perfect* change agent.

How Others Might View Her Efforts: There is reciprocity on helping another. She changes lives because others changed her life; *pay it forward*.

Personal Hopes: Does not want to change one life, she wants to change one life that changes another life that changes another life, etc.

Figure 7. Combines both the categories and the themes that were delineated from Madison's narratives and the characteristics or subthemes that were also extracted.

Portrait of Melinda Edwards

Founder of MeWise Pty. Ltd., Assistant Dean, Professor of Law, and Author

(Australia)

(Born 1963; 52 years of age)

Again, our interconnected world aided me in finding Melinda. Originally, I had secured a participant with a grassroots, nonprofit organization in Australia that trains activists in peaceful resolution. When the communication became less than sporadic, I searched for another Australian nonprofit group with a similar goal. Sharing a general message about my study and the need for participants with the Linkedin Group, Global and International World Peace Network, I was thrilled to get a reply from Melinda. The international breadth of the study and the focus on social change and social action intrigued her.

Melinda and I chatted throughout the course of our three interview sessions through Skype video conferencing. Clutching a hot cup of coffee in hand while nestled on her couch or sunning on her back deck with the blue skies and treetops lining the frame of the video screen, Melinda shared narrated accounts of her life. Each time we met for our interviews—across the seas yet from the comfort of our homes—she seemed a picture of Zen. Relaxed, composed, and content. The simple pleasure of hearing her lived experiences brought forth in me a curious hum that murmured quietly as I would nod egging her on for more fruitful details about her life, transformation, and social change.

Melinda's background has been steeped in the profession of law, litigation, teaching, and training. She recently authored a fictional, yet semiautobiographical book in 2014 titled, *Saving Virginia*. I was drawn to hear how her path in life had come to be, how she saw herself and the world, and how she has changed over the years. Born in New Castle, Melinda has worked as a professional in Queensland and Brisbane, Australia and throughout the world. She is known for her specific focus on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in regards to law and as a university assistant dean and professor. The founder of MeWise Pty. Ltd., she and her professional team worked internationally to empower communities and organizations with the ability to navigate complex issues in a peaceful manner through mediation and by way of conflict resolution strategies. Through an experiential approach, people explore options in a safe environment, learn, grow, and resolve conflict. She also offers pro bono work with the philosophy that "people" and "planet" are of utmost importance (MeWise, 2013).

When talking to Melinda, I was struck at how she always appeared so calm and peaceful. A gentle smile curled her lips upward and she would sit patiently awaiting my questions or pausing between thoughts to file through her own mental rolodex of experiences.

As a girl, Melinda grew up in a middle-class family in a multitude of Australian coastal towns. Her English father spent 3 months at a time at sea as a shipmaster or ship captain. Her fondness for her father literally caused her voice to ascend into a higher octave when she spoke about him. "I was very close to my father growing up, and he and I were probably more alike than I was with my mother or my brother." Her mother,

Australian born, reared both Melinda and a son (Melinda's older brother) while maintaining a career first as a nurse and then in real estate.

Her mother, often alone and head of the household while her father was at sea, displayed signs of fear Melinda shared. Melinda associated that fear, in part, to being alone for long periods, coupled with their relocation in Port Kembla on the east coast—a major port in the state of New South Wales where prostitution was a known factor. Melinda remembered her mother checking under the beds before going to sleep and impressing upon Melinda that "girls were prey:"

> I didn't realize how much that had affected me until—I feel a while into my life—because I wasn't adventurous personally but I was adventurous intellectually. And I think that's part of the reason why I became adventurous intellectually, because I was really quite limited personally.

Here, the boundaries her mother placed on her as a child seemed to translate into a restrictive confine that stifled her personal exploration of the world while enabling Melinda to explore her intellectual abilities with fervor.

As a child, Melinda accessed the coastal waters in the various towns in which they lived and became a competitive swimmer. She excelled in school and was proud to be recognized as a gifted student. Always an overachiever, she worked hard at whatever she pursued. Ambition often fueled her actions, propelling her toward opportunities typically reserved for the elite or affluent—a status that she did not identify with as a girl or an adult.

Attending the University of Law in Queensland in 1981 to obtain her Bachelor of Art degree, my questions summoned her former worry about not fitting in:

> Law school in those days was full of the *twin set and pearls brigade* [the wealthy], that's what I would say. So I had been to a state school. It was made

> very clear to me in my first week at law school that I was from the lowest socioeconomic area in Brisbane and the school that I had been to was not a school where it would have been difficult for me to get good marks . . . that was really their impression. And I think that that sort of reverse snobbery was also a bit of a chip that I carried because I was afraid I wasn't good enough to mix with the others.

Melinda steered cleared from the groups of girls who recently graduated from private schools "wearing pearls and designer clothes" and found her niche to be with the students studying agriculture, engineering, and sporting flip-flops and shorts. Her identity as a law student was starting to take shape but she certainly found herself on the fringes, never quite fitting in with her law school peers for these reasons.

Determined to become a litigator, Melinda then pursued a Master's of Law and Dispute Resolution at Bond University in 1992. As an associate in Dispute Resolution with the firm of Cooper Grace & Ward Lawyers, she felt the pull toward social action. Paired with a sense of obligation to pay forward the many "blessings" she had incurred over the years, Melinda explained:

> I guess as a young student, I was blown away by the idea that I got a free university education and here was I living in this amazing country where I didn't want for anything and I had the blessing of this education and I felt the need to give back in some way. So I guess that was the initial reason I asked Amnesty International, 'What can I do to help save the world?'

At the onset of her career in litigation Melinda partnered with Amnesty International and Green Peace as a lawyer. However, "the practice of law was very much in a bit of a bubble," she explained. "I found that the theory was admirable, but the practice was not." Although law seemed to be commendable work, she noted that, "litigation was like brain surgery with a hacksaw. It made so much more mess and pain than it fixed." This very

sentiment compelled her to start teaching about the topic and process of ADR and posit herself as an educator.

At Queensland University of Technology, Melinda not only became a professor in the Faculty of Law in the early 1990s, she resided as the Assistant Dean for Teaching and Learning between 2005-2013. Laughingly, she exclaimed that it was a bit "preposterous" that she could be a professor without any teaching qualifications by the sheer nature of being a practicing lawyer alone. Nonetheless, she embraced this new career dream and forged ahead determined to bring ADR into the university curriculum and be the best educator she could be. Law, after all, was more than just black and white rules and regulations. It was about human relationships, in Melinda's view. As a social change agent, Melinda found inspiration from the wanting to meet the needs of new law students coming to the university at the time with a desire to change the world and help disenfranchised individuals.

Ensconced with doubt, her colleagues challenged her every effort to bring ADR to the classrooms. This seemed to have awakened Melinda's desire to advance professionally into the assistant dean's role "to get sufficient authority and seniority within the university to actually make things happen." Her self-efficacy and agency to move her work forward for the good of her students and the changing world was unwavering. Many argued that her role should pertain strictly to the letter of the law (teaching litigation, facts, policy). A faint air of confidence came into our talking space at this point, and I could sense that Melinda was proud of her accomplishments at the university, though it was only her slanted smile that told me so.

The university did not initially embrace the concept of ADR merging law with interpersonal relationships, understanding social skills, and mediating disputes to avoid litigation. Through role-play, enacting scenarios, and analyzing case studies, Melinda found an untapped niche in the teaching of ADR in higher education in Australia. The collegial support at Queensland University of Technology continued to vacillate on the topic. It was only in 1992 that here in the United States that 162 of the 168 law schools surveyed by the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) had at least one ADR course offering. The rapid growth of ADR expanded over the years into comprehensive centers and research at universities in the United States and in institutions such as Stanford and Harvard, for example (Boskey, 1995). Melinda was fighting the good fight in Australia to bring these experiences to her students, also.

In terms of being an educator, Melinda admitted that at first she believed it was about imparting knowledge on others. However, in time, her views shifted toward inspiring others to engage in social action in the world, to empower others, and to become introspective problem-solvers. “It's about helping other people to be the best version of themselves. . . So that’s how I see education. Not the transmission of information but about helping them to find the answers within themselves.” A pioneer in the field of law education in Australia, she was one of the first to establish a widespread curriculum for ADR that taught people to mediate conflict themselves without relying on the judicial system and litigation.

In January of 2013, Melinda parted ways with the university and established her company, MeWise Pty. Ltd. Supporting others by training them in ADR, Melinda has found herself navigating the daunting waters of conflict resolution in the developing

countries of Bhutan, Thailand, Malaysia, and elsewhere. Social action, as she described it, is "a way of *being* in the world" that invites others to share their experiences while working collaboratively toward goals. Melinda is convinced that by sharing experiences and goals, people become empowered to inspire change in the world:

> Social action to me means being the change you want to see in the world, not just in a proverbial sense, but truly, so you have to live it. And then inviting others to share that experience with the goal (if it's meritorious and if it's authentic for them) that they will share in and go off and do.

Her company, MeWise, further ignited her social action in a slightly different manner. The opportunity to work hand in hand with oppressed people in need of ADR around the world called to her. She initially teamed with a colleague involved with Bridges Across Borders doing work in various universities in Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Their intention was to establish law clinics in which law students engaged in law practice and received credit for offering legal advice pertaining to social justice issues such as land rights, pregnancy, and parental rights. The people of Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam, who otherwise could not afford legal services, then had the opportunity to learn about their civil rights and the law in a practical sense that was now accessible to them. They learned about the benefits of talking through conflict to find a "win-win" solution that could provide long-term advantages to families and communities, Melinda opined in a hopeful and spirited tone.

The social change project that seemed most significant to Melinda was one that MeWise carried out in 2013 in the Kingdom of Bhutan in the Himalayas (between India and China, next to Tibet and Nepal). Originally under British control (foreign and defense policies) and then controlled by India, Bhutan has come to be known as the

happiest place on earth by many (Finding Happiness in Mystical Bhutan, 2011; One World Writing, 2014; Ra, 2011). Melinda shared in all seriousness that "Gross National Happiness (GNH) is more important than Gross Domestic Product (GDP)" in Bhutan. Valuing happiness over social progress, it was not until June 1999 that Bhutan established television and internet access (Bhutan's Busiest Cable Guy, 2002). Melinda respectfully painted the picture of Bhutan's slow march toward the 21st century in regards to progressing in areas of modern politics, economics, and social constructs and how it overlapped with her social action change work.

The Bhutanese people value conscious spirituality over all else. Melinda divulged during our interviews:

> From [a] Buddhist philosophy, if you believe in karma—whether or not somebody sees you do the wrong thing or whether or not there is a manmade law about it, it is overshadowed or is equally balanced by the idea that if you do the wrong thing—you will pay. There is a universal law of cause and effect that you cannot escape.

I share these details to frame the work Melinda engaged in and the mind-set of the people who collaborated with her through this AUS Aid Project (a project run in conjunction with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Australia). Her role would be to support changes being made to the legal system that was "based on individual respect" and "compassion." When speaking about the lawyers of Bhutan, she said, "Even lawyers have a high level of social conscious or consciousness around the idea that every action matters and you, therefore, are more deliberate about what you're doing." In moving toward this end of supporting the legal system framework, Melinda had the complex task of embedding the cultural norms of Bhutan and establishing perimeters of mediation and conflict resolution for its citizens.

Collaborating with the Princess of Bhutan, Ashi Sonam Dechan Wangchuck (a graduate of Stanford University-International Relations and Harvard Law School in the United States), she and Melinda set out to revamp the educational system and law system in Bhutan. Viewing education as a means to create an understanding (over time) about the long-term impact of ADR (as it plays out in the lives of adults struggling with conflict), a train-the-trainer model was used to bring peer mediation to schools to help teach children and teachers about the power of problem solving. "The education of young people was one of the most important things to supporting any change," Melinda articulated. With that notion in mind, Melinda offered fishbowl sessions at primary schools that allowed students and teachers the chance to role-play and offer feedback about what they were seeing, how to navigate the tenuous waters of conflict, and how to take responsibility for solving problems on their own or with peer guidance.

This model mirrors many of the peer mediation models or restorative justice programs implemented in schools here in the United States with children. In Bhutan, Melinda shared that she:

> Would train those mediators with the skills, a very simple model that required a few questions, and then there was an education program within the school around what a mediator does. They don't fix things for you, they don't tell you what to do, but they help you use problem solving, so you can look for peace rather than fighting.

As we dove in more deeply during our interviews about the impact of culture on her social action work, Melinda remained as humble and endearing as always. She acknowledged the distinct advantage she had in developing relationships with the Bhutanese based on her connection with a beloved friend. This friend had been doing volunteer work in Bhutan for 17 years and was awarded the red/maroon scarf or *kabney*.

It was an honor bestowed on a person to establish one's rank in society. Only high religious and civic officials wore the red scarf. By way of association with this friend, Melinda shared that the Bhutanese people readily accepted her:

> He was a maroon scarf, which meant that he held everybody's trust and confidence. And everybody embraced me. He took me into his network and all of a sudden, I was immediately a friend and trusted, and made it so much easier for me to get traction there.

She chuckled thinking back on the language barrier that existed and the undeniable truth that she was, in fact, still an outsider. A funny story ensued while we chatted about the lack of gender-identifying names in Bhutan. For example, there is no such thing as a *boy* or *girl* name*,* so this played out in quite a hilarious way during one role-play session she had arranged for a workshop with adult participants. Whereas we might set up working groups with names like John, Maria, Tyrell, and Ling in the United States, essentially, Melinda had set up groups more like Karma, Karma, Karma, Karma with no idea of the male to female ratio and no idea of who she had assigned roles to for the pending skits. I watched her clap her hands together and laugh as she told me the story:

> For me, I found myself in some incredibly funny situations. Everybody laughed and I laughed at myself and I think that that was the bit that helped me the most because I take a very self-effacing approach to teaching . . . when you're talking about ego, you have to talk about yourself and you have to make fun of yourself for it to really connect with people. And that helped me a lot because I was unlike any of their other teachers.

Overall, the Bhutanese people seemed to truly accept and welcome Melinda. The importance of setting one's ego aside when entering another culture was emphasized. It seemed to be key—vital, really.

As Melinda embarked on research and training in Bhutan, she realized the significance of asking the people for their input:

> It was such a privilege to work with them—because I had to for it to be authentic education—it had to grow with their input. They know their country better than I do. They know their legal system better than I do. So both my research project and my teaching had to be very responsive to what it was I learned along the way.

Melinda understood the importance of goals being organic to meet the needs of the people. No presumption can be made about what is best for another. It simply would be an action of the ego to do so.

Issues related to oppression and power were observed during her stay in Bhutan. Circling back to Bhutan's reputation for being known as one of the happiest places on earth, Melinda explained to me the challenge of teaching ADR in a culture that claps tightly to hierarchical power structures that perpetuate behaviors that protect the powerful and further oppress the powerless. In other words, the young do not question the old and wise; the farmer does not question the civil worker; the poor does not question the rich; and so on. Sacred to the culture is the imperative to save face and reputation—do not make another look foolish, avoid disgracing a person or place, and please . . . no tension brought on by conflict:

> You have to be very careful about the way you discuss those sorts of problems in a country that is known as being the *happiest place on earth*. The Prime Minister—everybody—is very conscious that their whole reputation in the worlds is that, 'We are the land of happiness, we have a social conscience, we are spiritually balanced,' all those things. And it's very important that they maintain that reputation.

Melinda explained that with this general need among the people to keep the peace and avoid any kind of conflict, a propagated and "entrenched disempowerment" of women

(particularly) persists today. Although the Bhutanese have actually engaged in community-based dispute resolution for hundreds of years, superstition and tradition have stunted the process. For instance, suppose a young Bhutanese woman finds herself unmarried and pregnant by a young man without the means to support her. It may be that she seeks counsel from a local person but is met with the following type of response, shared by Melinda:

> Conflict is a bad thing. You as a young woman are bringing—you'll bring bad weather, you'll bring bad crops and you'll bring bad luck if you cause conflict in our community. So you must not fight with this young man. You must find another way.

The nature of this *ignore the issue method* leaves young women unsupported, alone, and silenced for fear of bringing bad fortune to their village. The basic pillars of dispute or conflict resolution of listening to both parties so all interests are heard and looking for a solution that will meet both sides' interests has been abandoned (if it were ever truly practiced at all).

Melinda's poignant example addresses gender and power as it relates to her work with ADR in Bhutan. She explained that she needed to find a way to introduce "a model of mediation that was informed by the rule of law." Since the Bhutan Constitution recognizes a version of the Family Law Act that states that children should be supported by parents, then what Melinda needed to do was create a model of mediation that was "informed" by the "legal framework that underlies how the country is working now." This would require training people in terms of what is the law, mitigating conflict, and preserving cultural values simultaneously. Not an easy undertaking.

Melinda' pro bono work with MeWise in Bhutan resulted in special education consulting with schools; teaching teachers and students about peer mediation; educating farmers about agriculture and wine making to establish a self-reliant system of commercial options that stimulate the economy; and teaching ADR to law students, lawyers, and judges. In all of these instances, Melinda marveled at the strength of involving the Bhutanese people in the teaching and planning process of such work, especially in the schools:

> That was transformation . . . because you could see the teachers watching these kids blossom with the approach when they realized they were allowed to speak, they realized they were allowed to have an opinion, and they realized I would listen to their opinion and there wasn't a right or a wrong answer to it.

Offering students, teachers, lawyers, and law students the space to share their voice and collaborate to establish a process and legitimate respect for problem solving and mediation was new to the culture. The custom of avoiding conflict altogether or the disempowering vantage point of the younger to bow down to the elder to save face was now given some pause. Not that Melinda would be able to situate herself in such a context as the Other to change cultural norms in one foul swoop—this was neither her goal nor her end-result; however, she did create a space for individuals trained in ADR to have conversations that were not received as offensive, inappropriate, or simply disregarded.

Transformation and Summary

When listening to Melinda's experiences throughout her life, I could see how she evolved over time; not just in terms of her own perceptions of self and the world, but in her work and what it meant in the world. Social justice cannot be imposed on people. It is

not a top-down mandate that encourages the masses to respect one another. It is moving through life without anger in your heart, Melinda said, as a matter of fact. She shared the story with me of how she became interested in the psychology behind mediation while teaching Master's classes many years ago. It seems that mediation and peace of any kind must stem from within the individual:

> World peace has always been something that's thrown around but I used to talk about it a bit in terms of, 'The world could be a different place if people saw it from a more moderate heart space. And what causes war? War isn't caused by technology or politics or economics, war is caused because people are angry in their hearts. And the only way to really address that is with individuals and then you get a groundswell movement from the individual up. I don't think you can impose policies from the top down that are really going to make a difference.'

Based on her thoughts, I would make the supposition then that a person's transformation starts from within also. In Melinda's view, the *internal* supersedes the *external*.

I saw Melinda's life unwinding, in the way a ball of yarn might unwind if one held it by the tip of its string from a very high place. I do mean this in the way that it would unravel and come undone (much in the way her life has at times), but I also mean this in the way that she has opened up her heart and life to me in a manner that is vulnerable, making real that perfection is often a futile pursuit. The unfurling of her experiences has now become a part of who I am. She admits to losing her own way at one point in her career; becoming consumed with climbing the ladder of professional success. It consumed her, she said regretfully. Every waking hour was spent trying to earn legitimacy and promotions as an attorney:

> That brought me to a place where I felt very unwell. I'd lost my visibility of giving and it was all about the corporate profit motive—didn't fit with me feeling like I was a valuable person. I didn't feel like what I was doing was good for people. I could see that was, I guess, what took me to education and that became my way of giving back and doing something good.

Becoming an educator paved the way for Melinda to become a social change advocate. A mother once divorced and happily remarried, she is an elevated spirit; enlightenment seemed to permeate our interviews as she spoke about her transformation. Often mentioning "karma," "empowerment," "loving," and "forgiving," fragments of the Buddhist religion wove in and out of her social change work becoming part of the woman she is today.

Melinda has not gone through life without her own bumps and bruises but the degree to which I am able to disclose such details (upon her request for confidentiality about these things) is limited. She said with certainty, "One of my favorite phrases is that, 'Sometimes things have to fall apart to come together again differently.'" Having heard of the moments that brought her to the brink of despair and then back to life again, I can only assure any readers that if anyone knows this phrase to be true, it must be Melinda. She spoke about fear, revealing that little frightens her anymore. Today she is not afraid of failing, of not being good enough, or of not having all of the answers.

Melinda's heightened awareness of her own personal transformation struck me more than it did anyone else I spoke with during my interviews. She acknowledged that people have to look inward at the self to discover what might need changing before trying to change the world. Melinda acknowledged that she once was caught in a trap, consumed by "looking good, being right . . . pleasing people, being the teacher, being the savior, being the rescuer, and having all the right answers." Melinda proudly exhaled with knowing that she had let all of that go. As I listened to and watched her, I sensed that she really had; she really had let all of the chaos go. Left in its place was contentment and peace.

Mentioning the need to put one's ego aside once again, she articulated the importance of realizing how little people have control over in life at times. She shared with utter grace, "But to be part of the solution, I need to work with every other person that's trying to, you know, make it work. And I need to be able to see things from their perspective." This idea of viewing the world from another's seat—their situation, position, context—was critical in her own transformation and in her life's work. The world itself becomes a "learning opportunity."

A very special moment transpired when Melinda shared with me that our interviews together had awoken something in her that lay dormant for a few months. She had been hoping to return to Bhutan to help establish a new law school at the World University Bhutan (as part of the Royal Law Project with the Princess). A call for proposals had been made and a colleague had just forwarded the details to her. Melinda seemed to shine brighter than usual with excitement at the prospect of doing this work and offered her appreciation to me; as if our conversations had some how rekindled a spark in her or helped to align the stars:

> It's all come back to me [my work in Bhutan]. It was interesting that doing these interviews with you brought it all to the top of my mind because I hadn't done it for a while . . . it kept me awake last night . . . thank you.

I never anticipated that my interviews would become a lived experience for the participants of my study, but I suppose I was shortsighted to have not considered their impact. So before we even concluded our last interview session together, I was already realizing the beautiful and unfinished progression of Melinda's transformation.

I asked her what she thought people might say about her and her work 10 years from now: "Well, what I'm doing makes a lot of sense to me in the context of how the

world is now, but will what we're doing now make any sense in 10 years?" Although it was rhetorical, I could not stop the voice inside of me from stammering in my head, "I don't know. None of us do, really." It has been refreshing to hear so many of the participants acknowledge this temporal notion of who we are and our reach in the world. Yet, even in this unknowing—in the certainty that we do *not* know what tomorrow will look like—we start each day anew with the hope that it will count in the life of another, some way, somehow.

When Melinda and I spoke more about perspective and how it matters in regards to conflict resolution around the world, she smiled and let her shoulders sink low and relaxed. She narrated the following, a lesson used with young children when teaching about resolving their problems: "There are four statements that people don't say enough . . . and they are, 'I'm sorry, forgive me, thank you, and I love you.'" As our sessions wound down, I felt I was about to say goodbye to a friend I might never see again. And like all of the other women I had come to know through these interviews, I understood the gift of their experiences now lying fragile in my hands.

Figure 8 provides more details about Melinda's experiences and social actions. Chapter Five explores these categories and themes in a more distinct fashion, in addition to examining the relationships across themes to other participants of the research study. Through such inquiry, both common and uncommon conditions related to transformation are revealed.

Figure 8. Unit analysis, Melinda Edwards: Categories and themes.

Category I: Perceptions of Self and World: Girl

Themes: **Context**: New Castle, Brisbane, Queensland, and various, AU **Date of Birth**: 1963

Identity: Educated, White, English Australian, female. Competitive, pleaser, gifted student. Anxious, stressed. Close to father and most like him. Afraid of failing. Believed women were prey (mother's perception passed on). Girls get married. Idealistic about changing the world.

Situationality: Youngest child of two; older brother. Blue collar, working class. Work hard to get ahead in life. Moved often due to father's Ship Captain jobs; father often away. Lived in working class industrial, seaport towns; middle-class. Witnessed prostitution in seaport towns. Felt lucky, privileged.

Positionality: Father often gone at sea for months at a time; sustained a nervous breakdown. Mother fearful of intruders or men taking advantage of women; taught that women were prey. Mother's influence: women get married and have jobs; could be a school Head Master (ceiling on success based on gender).

Self-Efficacy: Strong work ethic, tried to please others; hard work reaps success in life. Wanted to be a backup singer; realized this was not practical. Competitive swimmer, smart student. University education free in Australia, pursued law school. *Adventurous intellectually* rather than *personally*. Female limits.

World View: Dangerous place. Observed socioeconomic rift when at university; did not fit in with *twin set and peals brigade* (affluent)..

Category II: **Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)**

Themes: **Defining Educator**: An educator empowers people; helps people discover the best versions of themselves. It is not the transmission of information but helping others find answers within themselves. Education is the key to social change.

Agency: Lawyer, Professor in Faculty of Law, and Dean for Teaching and Learning at Queensland University of Technology; volunteer with Bridges Across Borders; Founder of MeWise Pty. Ltd. (pro bono work with marginalized people regarding conflict resolution and law); and author. Teach and train others.

Subthemes: **Personal Education**: Bachelor of Art degree, Law, The University of Queensland, 1985; Master of Law degree, Dispute Resolution at Bond University, 1992.

Being an Educator: Teaching credentials not required in higher education to teach at university. Wanted to create a generation of lawyers that were more open to the idea that interest based resolutions could bring people real life solutions.

Category III: **Social Action, Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)**

Themes: **Defining Social Action**: Social change means *being* the change one wants to see in the world; a way of *being*. Being willing to be self-reflective and change self first. Sharing an experience with others to push past conflict to find world peace.

Context: Lawyer, Professor and Dean at Queensland University, and Founder of MeWise

Dates of Social Change Engagement: 1992-Present

Self-Efficacy: Saw law as a tool for social change. Spoke about changing the world and then saw education as a catalyst for change. Believed she could influence the curriculum and introduce Alternative Dispute Resolution. Met with resistance from university at onset but persisted over the years. Believed she could work with oppressed people in Southeast Asia Pacific regarding peaceful conflict. Try ideas; do not die wondering *what if* . . .

Agency: Professionally worked towards social change by teaching Alternative Dispute Resolution to law students; became required coursework. Founded company, MeWise; trains law students, lawyers, and oppressed communities in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Bhutan about Alternative Dispute Resolution. Developed curriculum.

Subthemes: **Driving Forces Towards Social Action**: Law students became enthralled with helping the disempowered, disenfranchised (1990s); a need for Alternative Dispute Resolution curriculum. Experiences with Bridges Across Borders, volunteering and working with oppressed people regarding law and conflict. Marginalized people of developing and Third World nations asked for peaceful conflict resolution guidance. *Blessed* with free public education and good life.

Pivotal Social Action Experience(s): MeWise, Alternative Dispute Resolution work in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Expectations/Goals: Organic goals resulting from the needs of the people and context. Looking for a *win-win* solution vs. *win-lose* solution. Train others in Alternative Dispute Resolution so they could pass on the knowledge and skills to resolve conflict (i.e., land disputes, family disputes, community concerns, student peer mediation in schools, etc.).

Lessons Learned: Must avoid making others *wrong* to make self *right*. There are four statements people do not say often enough: I'm sorry, forgive me, thank you and I love you. People (Bhutanese) needed a voice in the process of change or establish Alternative Dispute Resolution. Sustainable work is key. Humility. Trust needed.

Self-Awareness: Karma. Looking inward to make changes in self before changing the exterior world. Alternative Dispute Resolution is better for all people, better for their health, their spiritual wellness, their compassion, and helps others to take responsibility in their problems.

Category IV: **Response to Efforts with MeWise in Kingdom of Bhutan (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)**

Themes: **Culture**: Originally under British control (foreign and defense policies) and then controlled by India. Bhutan sees self as the happiest place on earth; Gross Domestic Happiness. Avoid conflict and save face. Social progress very slow; TV and internet fairly recent (1999). Buddhism and karma were a way of life. Must be diplomatic and sensitive in sharing ideas. Many countries have tried to assist Bhutan in developing; the *popular* thing to do.

Gender: Women are disempowered. Domestic violence had been *normalized*. Melinda found the people respected her. Multiagency approach to dissect violence was needed. Empower Bhutanese to teach one another the Alternative Dispute Resolution; sustaining model.

Other: Initially, had to prove self and expertise but did have a friend who earned Maroon Scarf (socially respected), which helped greatly to earn trust. Needed to laugh at self, get rid of ego, connect with people; build trust. Australian accent helped build relationships (more easily understood). Must observe another's perspective; listen to their stories.

Inner-Conflict: Alternative Dispute Resolution is difficult to establish when there is an imbalance of power (i.e., respect and voice for men but less for women. Mediation requires all sides to be voiced and considered; equal power base needed.

Category V: **Perceptions of Self and World**: **Woman (Praxis)**

Themes: **Context**: Brisbane, AU

Identity: Previous litigator, professor and dean. Social change agent and author. Sees self as learner and *integrator* of others' viewpoints. Fearless.

World View: World is not simple or black and white. World is complex. There is no right and no wrong way. We must try to understand where people come from (context). World is a

learning opportunity.

Category VI: **Transformation and Life Lessons (Praxis)**

Themes: **Transformation**: Once believed she hit *professional ceiling* as a mother (could not take on certain work and was limited by pregnancy or child rearing). No longer consumed with climbing professional and social ladder. Now feels she can pursue opportunities. More conscious of how much she still has to learn about people and world. No more fear and nothing to prove. Learning about her parents' history, her own loss and grief, all shaped her.

Lessons Learned: Humanitarian acts require loving and forgiving, not judging to make others wrong. Religion cannot heal the world because it focuses on differences.

How Others Might View Her Efforts: No aspirations to have her name associated with any particular thing. . . Realizes that her efforts *now* make sense in the context this place and time; they not in the future.

Personal Hopes: An understanding that many people are trying to make a positive difference in the world from their very limited perspectives. Acknowledging that as a human species we should unite.

Figure 8. Combines both the categories and the themes that were delineated from Melinda's narratives and the characteristics or subthemes that were also extracted.

Portrait of Linda Brodine

Director of United Way and Children's Book Author

(Born 1943; 72 years of age)

Sitting across from Linda at an IHOP for breakfast, we sipped coffee and started our first interview session in a booth made for four in a western suburb of Illinois. Our subsequent interviews were conducted over the telephone throughout the months of March and April 2015. Small in stature only, Linda keeps her short, red hair spiked while balancing tiny round glasses on her bright face. "Hello!" she boomed upon seeing me waiting for her. As I stood to greet her with a hug, I realized she barely came up to my shoulder in height.

I met Linda as a fellow children's book author presenting at the Illinois Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (IASCD) Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Conference in March 2015. When she shared that she had been the Director of United Way in LaSalle, Illinois for over 20 years, I asked if she would like to participate in my study. Our conversations spanned over three interview sessions and often revolved around her family and her faith in Christian Science.

Linda was talkative, even in these early morning hours as we first sat together looking over the breakfast menu. I watched her as she sat, small in stature but large in personality. She was soft spoken but confident in her words and prattled on as if we had known each other for years. Sometimes it was difficult to interject and pose a question while the words and stories of over 70 years fell forth like a river released from its dam. I marveled at her energy and wondered what I might be like when I reached her age in

another 31 years. At that moment, it seemed so far off in the distance, yet I was starting to notice each day passing by more quickly than the previous.

Reminiscing during our first interview, Linda referenced her childhood as a "lonely" and "magical time." Born in the middle of World War II, she grew up as an only child on a farm in the suburb of Naperville (west of Chicago). She explained that the area was wooded and isolated when she was a girl. Oftentimes, she turned to books, playing in the woods, and her imagination for entertainment:

> When I was nine years old, we moved out to the country in a rural neighborhood. Of course, this is about 60-some years ago. And we lived out in the country—very few neighbors, got a few friends from school, but we had a nice piece of property—where as a kid, I was able to sort of be a little wood elf in the woods exploring, climbing trees, finding arrowheads. We were surrounded by cornfields and bean fields, and it was rather a magical time. I didn't see it that way then because being an only child I felt lonely.

Thinking of this quiet life, she smiled adding that her mother was extremely artistic and the family had one car. If Linda was not outside playing she was in the house helping her mother with chores, like many other young girls at that time, she alluded. Piano lessons, swim lessons, and ice skating were a complete joy to her as a child.

The legacy and love of her family was frequently referred to when discussing the past. It was the ordinary remnants left in her memory, like long drives to visit family or stories she passed down to her own children and grandchildren, that she cherished most. When asked about what race she identified with, Linda proudly said, "Whenever I am asked that question, I say *American*." Her parents' ethnic origin was Czech-Bohemian and Polish, she inserted (Bohemia is now a region in the Czech Republic at the center of Europe). Her faith infiltrated all of our interviews. Although she has been a Christian

Scientist for many years now, Linda attended Catholic high school and expressed that she felt pressure to conform as a child.

Linda remembered having very little confidence as a girl but acknowledged it growing inside of her as she aged. A neighboring family often turned to Linda as a babysitter and it was then that she realized she was capable, organized, and had the ability to lead. The impact this family had on her self-esteem was significant, according to Linda. The Hollywood actor, Kim Novak, was the aunt to the children she babysat and they would often take vacations (asking Linda to come along as part of the family). In our conversations, Linda also expressed how much she adored road trips with her own aunt and uncle as a late teen. Her world expanded exponentially and she found that she was a natural at care-taking and organizing life tasks. It was in these moments of taking care of her neighbor's children that she was becoming a leader and the seeds of self-efficacy were unconsciously flourishing:

> I found myself capable. Oftentimes when you're really super young, and the way I was (an only child and strict parents), you had to conform. You kind of follow. You're a follower, not so much a leader. However, I found that I had some sort of a natural ability (didn't even know it back then) . . . So I found when I went over to the neighbors on my own at a very young age, I was able to clean the kitchen, do the laundry, take care of the kids, change the diapers, read, go for walks, do whatever it took to keep them happy.

Linda's parents did not encourage her to go to college, sending the message that a woman's *place* was in the home raising a family. But Linda's father urged her to take college preparatory classes—I could sense that his support was important to her. On the other hand, she distinctly remembers her male cousin being embolden to pursue college:

> Back then, this was in the '60s [1960s] and I did go to a Catholic high school. My parents felt it was important. And of course women back then were not really encouraged to go on to college. I took all of the college preparatory classes

> because my dad felt that that was a good idea and I loved it. I was very good in school, almost a straight A student, taking trigonometry and sciences and all that kind of thing. I loved it. Not very practical because then in between junior and senior year I had to take a typing class (because I was not in the business class), so that was helpful. And women back then where not really encouraged.
>
> I remember my boy cousin, who was a year older than I, looking at colleges and talking about going to college and all of that, whereas me and my cousin (my girl cousin, who was a year younger than I), we were not encouraged.

Faint regret seemed to be buried in these words; however, my intuition told me that there would be more to come regarding academia and its place in Linda's life.

She shared that she did not want to get married right after high school, she yearned for college:

> I, on the other hand was following along with, I guess, encouragement probably from my mom and all of that and my friends at high school. We were looking for a soul mate, because back then you either got married or if you did go to school you became a teacher or a nurse—nothing wrong with those—or a secretary. Nothing wrong with any of those wonderful professions but you *were* more encouraged to get married.

Linda began working after high school and soon met her future husband. I could tell she was proud of him for his sense of adventure and his support of her over their 51 years together. In 1962, at the age of 18, Linda married her husband and started a family. Although very involved in her children's lives and their schooling, Linda found herself wanting more. In her 30s, she decided to go to a community college to get an Associate degree in accounting and business. The thrust of her career as the Regional Director of United Way in LaSalle, Illinois took root when she accepted a job as an assistant. While later filling in temporarily as the director, the board acknowledged her efforts and asked her to stay on permanently. Twenty years passed before Linda retired in 1999 from that

role. “Every step leads to the place you are,” she admitted while tilting her head and raising her eyebrows.

United Way is a nonprofit organization well known in the United States for its efforts to improve “lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities around the world to advance the common good” (United Way: Vision, Mission, and Goals, 2015). Through support, contributions, and training in areas of education, socioeconomics, and health, the United Way has extended to impact the lives of people all around the world to assist them in reaching their fullest human promise. Linda’s commitment to this vision was attained through a myriad of projects she organized and led in her region, which spanned nine communities. Oftentimes, Linda facilitated efforts with agencies such as The American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, Against Domestic Violence, The Illinois Valley Food Pantry, and other community organizations.

The United Way project most near and dear to her heart began in 1992 and was called the Labor of Love. Modeled after the Christmas in April Project (now called Rebuilding Together) honoring National Rebuilding Day by securing volunteers to restore the homes of low-income families, the disabled, the elderly, and others in need of assistance, Linda and United Way forged their own path to help marginalized individuals in the nine communities her regional United Way served. Embracing her own personal anthem, “One person can make a difference,” she set out to encourage people to join her in the effort to assist those most in need: the poor, abused women, the elderly, children, the sick, and the mentally and physically impaired.

What started with the rehabilitation of only five homes a year, eventually turned into 15 homes a year under Linda’s direction. By securing donations and working closely

with volunteers (both skilled and unskilled) in construction, carpentry, electrical engineering, and all things home repair, she managed to create a legion of change agents willing to dedicate their time and energy to the cause. House Captains led each home project, however, the cleanup and repair teams were met with challenges that ranged from hoarding, pet infestations, and mold removal to roof repair, painting, and bathroom remodeling jobs.

As we discussed goals and expectations for such social change undertakings, Linda brought up collaboration. She articulated the importance of working toward "a common good, a common goal together." Rebuilding Together had to consider the needs of each individual homeowner:

> It just depended on who you were dealing with. It's just like with anything, every situation is different. Every single home was different. All the people were entirely different. We did have standards that we had to abide by. Naturally, when you do something like that, you have to have policies, procedures, we had all kinds of paperwork that everybody had to sign, waivers that all the volunteers had to sign, information the homeowners had to sign.

Completely by chance, I joined Rotary International this spring to volunteer for their Rebuilding Together project. Inspired by what I had learned from Linda, I spent a couple of days alongside other volunteers working on homes in my community. It was just as she had explained. A House Captain doled out tasks and small groups of people tackled jobs to improve a home in need of repair. Had I not had these conversations with Linda, I would not have known what the project was about and admittedly might have overlooked this opportunity to literally help a neighbor. The home I focused on was only two blocks away from my house. It was there in this green, two-story home that I met the owner, Miss Ruth. We laughed and she offered coffee and drinks as I learned for the first time

how to glaze the windows of what was likely a home constructed in the early 1900s. I ripped out carpets, scrubbed floors, scraped and painted the garage, and helped to clean out the basement. Droves of volunteers came and went and I made friends that day that I will surely bump into within my own neighborhood. Thanks to Linda, I was able to be a part of this national project.

In recent years, Linda has turned her knack for storytelling and quilting into a new career. As a children's book author, she tries to offer stories inspired from her own childhood on the farm, and those composed of her own children and grandchildren, as a means to encourage others to express their "freedom of thought and action." She now visits schools to share her lived experiences through the images on her quilts that accompany her books. Linda confided that after all the years with her experiences and stories, she sees herself as more of an "explorer" than an educator.

As she further deliberated over what being an educator means, Linda found herself crediting a natural, nurturing side of her that surfaced by virtue of being a mother. As she pondered the idea of being an educator she referred to the need to have confidence and punctuated the importance of being a learner instead:

> With me, I opened my thought a lot to other ideas. You have to be confident. You have to be open-minded. You have to welcome new ideas, new thoughts, either to think about them, analyze, and then either hold on to them as your own or dismiss them. I mean we all are like little computers, little sponges. We're taking all this [life and experiences] in. It's the whole world.

Linda's role in life as an educator came packaged as mother, wife, grandmother, children's book author, and United Way Director. In each respective role, she feels she has taught others and they have taught her. "So I guess in a way, getting back to your initial question about being an educator, we all can be educators in different ways; just a

conversation or someone's life experience" can be educative. Reciprocity was also mentioned, again, remaining a stronghold in the life of the women I interviewed.

Linda chuckled often as she spoke about and shared with a sense of certainty and wonderment that, "You never ever know when or if what you do is ever going to lead to anything else." However, despite this honest admission that life's many destinations or targets may be hazy or sometimes a surprise, she continuously noted that having a sense of self and self-confidence were key. It is merely impossible to write about the educator role Linda personified throughout her life without considering her own thirst for ongoing learning and storytelling. Bundled inside of each person's life story is his or her identity and wisdom, she exclaimed when explaining what it meant to be an educator:

> It just is an unfolding of life experiences. And it's interesting, going all the way back and then moving forward because you do realize how all these different episodes in your life play a role in who you are, what you become, what your interests are. And I do realize not everyone has those opportunities.

Perhaps, it is in her belief that everyone is "uniquely beautiful," no matter the circumstances, motivated the social change agent inside of her. As she pondered her sentiments during one of our sessions, an awareness of marginalized individuals and those who have little to no social capital came through. When asked about what drew her to social action and social change, in true storyteller fashion, she brought me back to a day on her childhood farm when her mother ran to the fields to gaze at the cloud formations as the storm rolled in.

"Someone else," Linda started, "with the lightning, the thunder, the wind, possible tornadoes, devastation (whether it's in the ocean or on land), would hide and run away." But her mother did not. Her analogy depicted a person who either goes toward the need

(the social change agent) or runs away from the need (one unmoved to engage in social change). Her mother then had inadvertently inspired Linda's social consciousness while standing amidst the wind and watching the storms roll in on hot summer days. I could imagine the purple skies and the lightning railing in the distance; the figure of her mother staring into the storms while others ran for safety. The metaphor made complete sense to me and I drew on this image when considering this through the eyes of a young girl.

This matter of "perception" as she called it, boomeranged back to her faith and her conviction that "light always overcomes darkness" in the world. Unwaveringly, Linda confided that "love for humanity" and "hope for the future" void of postulating that one group is *right* while another is *wrong* is what drives social change; there can be no winners or losers.

I had never considered this philosophy before but was starting to realize, as I listened to the women of my study, that I too felt this way.

Still on the topic of what drew her to become interested in social change, Linda explained that she had felt "blessed" in her life. Like others I spoke to, she said:

> I have felt so blessed through the years. From day one, I've enjoyed volunteering. Now I don't know where that comes from. It's something inside you. And you want to help other people. You want to nurture. Maybe it comes from my mothering instincts. I don't know.

The idea of nurturing floated to the top of our discourse, as does the foam on a freshly steamed latte. It had manifested in nearly all conversations with the women of my study and often was associated specifically with womanhood, gender, or mothering. I associated my own nexus to *nurturer* with sisterhood (being the oldest of five siblings; girls, as it were).

Social action, Linda posited, is "a life style" choice. It is not necessary to label one's self as a change agent. To be a change agent was simply "a way of being" that could inspire or create change. Linda continued by emphasizing the significance of cultivating a climate or "atmosphere" free of judgment when remembering her social change work with The United Way. She noted that a "life style" of noticing others, accepting others, and acting in service of others is not unique to those who believe in social change. It really amounts to respecting people and treating them well:

> And so it just was, like I say, a good atmosphere. And I guess isn't that what we're [people are] trying to do? We ourselves, I mean, it's our atmosphere and our actions. I mean that's how we actually get to know somebody. It's not by what they're wearing or how they look. It's the way they treat others and themselves.

Through our three interviews, we further explored the impact that gender and culture may have had on Linda's social action experiences and the woman she is today, Doing so more fully revealed her perceptions of the world and herself. When asked how she thought others might have perceived her efforts, she shared:

> I never really felt intimidated, or I don't know—sometimes like those you might think—not appreciated or . . . I never really felt that way. I think when someone has an inner spirit of service; you know you're going to meet all kinds of people (which I did). You name it, I met them. And it just—sometimes it's hard. But then I also had a great support from home: my husband, my children, my church.

I found it interesting that she mentioned intimidation and I wondered if this came from an ingrained sense that women in leadership roles *should be* or *should feel* intimidated by others (men, perhaps). Although she did not feel intimidated, she was compelled to make note of it. Would a man who was asked the same question answer with a preconceived notion that he *should* feel intimidated by others?

Long before Linda started writing children's books, she took up the hobby of quilting. As mentioned, she now embeds her stories into quilt pieces and shows them to students at schools while also teaching them the craft. Their quilts later get donated to sick children in hospitals. When Linda brought me through these acts of education and social action, I recognized how meaningful this work was to her. Her eyes gave her away and she scooted as close to me as possible in our breakfast booth during our first interview.

Without foreshadow, she shared an epiphany related to gender and the history of quilting she recently had while attending an exhibition at the Geneva History Center. She was awe struck at the "artistic quality of these massive quilts from the 1800s." Without modern day machines and measuring tools, these women (mostly uneducated and living on farms) created intricate designs requiring high-level math skills and ingenuity. What dawned on Linda was that these women were "gifted." These women were the geniuses of their time, creating masterpieces:

> Of course, they were gifted. They were the mathematicians, the scientists. If [they were alive] today, they would've been sending people to the moon. They had those qualities and those gifts within them, where maybe one minute they were churning butter and hanging clothes on the line and making food and gardening and all that, feeding the animals, but at night by the gas lamp they were doing these massive designs. Unbelievable.

I found it so fascinating to hear her make this connection to gender, gender roles, and opportunity as it related to the 1800s. I could not disagree; these women likely were the unrecognized mathematicians, scientists, and engineers of their time.

As we analyzed the role of culture in her United Way work, the discourse centered mostly on socioeconomics. Serving as the director, the many people Linda

worked to assist in the counties she served were living in poverty or receiving public assistance, such as federal funds for food, housing, or compensation for a disability. Most of the people she collaborated with offered thanks and showed gratitude for her help. What I found most interesting though were the stories she told concerning the range of personalities she encountered. Some appreciative, some proud, some entitled, some rude.

The following quotes demonstrate the gamut of responses she received—from those accepting donations to those *expecting* assistance at a food pantry. There were cases when she internalized feelings of being the Other. In ways, the marginalized individuals she worked with embraced her for offering help through The United Way. At other times, she was left reeling, not knowing how to respond to people that exercised feelings of entitlement or repeatedly tried to take advantage of the system of support. Some,

> Would accept it [the donation], usually willingly, and some rather grudgingly, because they wanted to do everything themselves. They didn't want a hand out, they were just very proud. Then you've got those in the middle and you've got the others.

> And if you really want to know what it's like to be in social services, you want to work the homeless shelter or a food pantry because here again, it's the gamut of people. You've got the one end where they're shamed, humiliated, mortified, they can't even lift their heads up because they're so humbled by being in need. Then you've got the other end where there are people (as we all know), they expect it. They demand it. 'You give me this. I want money. I want a house. You fix this, you do that . . .' It's very, very sad. And unfortunately, there is a lot of that out in the world today, and of course, you want to help the *truly* needy.

Being a social change agent by way of her profession, Linda recognized that she was a "social servant." As she considered the many people she worked with (e.g., agencies, donors, those in need of assistance), listening remained paramount. "You have to have humility to think to yourself, 'Well, these people probably know a lot more than I do and I could probably learn from them,' which I did." Like so many others working toward

social change (including myself), learning from others was indeed an exercise in humility.

Transformation and Summary

Reflecting on how Linda might have changed or transformed over the past 72 years, she drew a long pause and imagined looking out of a window and seeing the world in its totality now as an adult. As Linda put it, "sheltered as a child," the world now as an adult,

> Can appear overwhelmingly tragic and harmful and scary; however, you, as one person, can make a difference by using whatever qualities and gifts that you're given, that you have, to help and nurture and I guess make a difference in some form or way.

The element of confidence that flourished within, brought on by the passing of years and varied experiences, seemed to be most treasured by her. Deepening qualities of kindness, understanding herself and her talents, and working to benefit others all represent a metamorphic change. "I just believe that my life is kind of like a tapestry where you just take all these different, wonderful experiences and you move forward." She sees the world as a spiritual place, a cross-section of various faiths, peoples, and nationalities.

When Linda elaborated on her perspectives of the world, and how she saw herself in the world today, an undeniable presence of her faith shrouded the conversation. The Catholic girl who used to consider conforming to appease others has evolved into a woman who is introspective and possesses the freedom of thought and choice based on her Christian Science faith. Linda credits her parents, her upbringing, and all of life's experiences for making her the woman she is. An observance of both "good and evil" in the world infiltrated our last two interviews, particularly. I was amazed by her complete

certainty that "light" (good) would always outweigh the "darkness" (evil); metaphorically speaking, that is. She spoke with serenity in here voice—void of worry—calmed by the belief that all of life's horrors, injustices, and suffering would in fact be resolved:

> As it happens, I've been very blessed. And each of us is blessed in different ways even though many individuals have to deal with horrific situations. It isn't anything that we close our eyes to, but we do have to realize that light always outshines the darkness. And, you know, even those individuals will come to see the beautiful light and safety and protection.

Offering the insight and awareness that all things are relative (according to one's situation, position, context), Linda said with a hushed voice, "Of course, my idea of working extremely hard and someone else working in a factory or being desperately poor or not having any advantages is very different." When she mentioned the gains of "working extremely hard" and the hypothetical mileage one gains from that, I could not help asking her to explain her thinking about those who are oppressed, living in poverty, suffering, or are not afforded the life choices she so much appreciated. In short, Linda again relied heavily on the notion that good will prevail, God will oversee, and she will continue to follow divine direction.

Before concluding our interview sessions, Linda considered the lasting impact of her work while engaging in social change. Her voice became silent in a way it had not in all of our time together. What she loves most about learning about one's self and others is peeling back the layers that makes each person unique. Waffling between being an educator and explorer at times, she offered:

> I'm exploring myself, my own ideas. I'm exploring the world. Even though I wouldn't consider myself well read, I wouldn't consider myself even an educator. I wouldn't consider myself brilliant in any way, shape, or form, but I do consider myself an explorer.

Linda hopes that her work with others and young children creates a space for freedom of thought and a love for nature. In a world sometimes brimming with pain, she hopes that the presence of "mystery" will inspire people to seek ways to contribute in the world:

> I think that that goes back to that word *mystery* where you're never quite comfortable, never quite sure in your own life, and you don't want to just leave everything to everybody else (not that we can do everything), but it gives us a sense of excitement and that sense of wanting to go and do something.

When thinking about her work and the world that children will inherit, Linda shared that children "need a sense of motivation to explore themselves in a way that they are able to find new ideas to help and heal." Closing our talks, she reminded me that we are not going to find perfection is this life. I released a deep breath that had expanded in my chest knowing I had heard this before.

"It's each person's adventure. It's each person's view. It's each person's perception of the world, how it was, how it is, how it will be, how it should be," Linda said with a clarity ringing through the phone in this last session together.

> And, you know, as I say, you take everything with you—all your experiences. And you can't be phony about it. You can't pretend to know something that you don't. I can't go out there and perform a surgery. I do what I can in some small way. And yet, I think if we focus on the good and being helpful and kind, to be a benefit in small way, I think that speaks well of each person, each and every one, being kind and truthful and using those good qualities to benefit others.

And that was how she ended our interviews; with the simple truth that one person can only do so much but one person can make a difference.

Figure 9 presents details regarding Linda's experiences and social actions. Chapter Five explores these categories and themes in a more distinct fashion, in addition to examining the relationships across themes to other participants of the research study.

Through such inquiry, both common and uncommon conditions related to transformation are revealed.

Figure 9. Unit analysis, Linda Brodine: Categories and themes.

Category I: Perceptions of Self and World: Girl

Themes: **Context**: Illinois, U.S. **Date of Birth:** 1943

Identity: White, Catholic, Czech/Bohemian Polish American, female. *Typical* child; swimming and piano lessons, good ice skater. Loved the outdoors. Smart and did well in school. Lacked confidence. Nurturing.

Situationality: Only child in middle-class family. Lived in the country with one car; *lonely existence* but also *magical time*. Dominant gender roles of the times (1940s-1950s). Felt need to conform; follow (not a leader). Women went to work or got married after high school and started family. Felt *stifled* or *trapped*.

Positionality: Helped mother around house with chores and babysat neighbor's children, father worked. Took advanced college prep classes in high school, however, not encouraged to go to college. Married at age 19.

Self-Efficacy: Strong organizational skills realized while babysitting. Self-confidence started to grow.

World View: Traveled within U.S. with aunt, uncle, and neighbors. Limited view of the world. Sheltered.

Category II: Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)

Themes: **Defining Educator**: Anyone can be an educator. A conversation, storytelling, or a life experience can be educative. Teaching is giving back to the world; paying it forward.

Agency: Volunteer, Regional Director of United Way, children's book author and presenter. Sharing ideas and stories with others. Helping marginalized people in her community.

Subthemes: **Personal Education**: Associate degree, Accounting and Business, Illinois Valley Community College, late 1970s.

Being an Educator: Does not consider herself well-read or an educator. Sees self as an *explorer*; a sense of wanting to go and do something.

Category III: **Social Action, Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)**

Themes: **Defining Social Action**: Social action comes from *within*, a *lifestyle*. It is the desire to help others within a community. One person can make a difference. It is one's atmosphere and actions and how one treats others.

Context: Volunteer, Regional Director of United Way, children's book author and presenter.

Dates of Social Change Engagement: 1979-1999

Self-Efficacy: Went to college to earn Associates degree in her thirties. Self-confidence continuously growing inside of her. Took on job of Assistant with United Way. Board asked her to become new director; felt *green* but took the role.

Agency: Became Regional Director of United Way in LaSalle, Illinois. Assisted marginalized individuals within nine communities: the elderly, the cognitively and physically impaired (adults and children), single mothers, and the poor. Passes down stories to children through

storybooks and quilting. One person can make a difference.

Subthemes: **Driving Forces Towards Social Action**: Volunteered at her children's school and at church. All experiences led her to where she is today; sometimes a person does not know their path. *Divine* intervention and prayer. Supportive husband and family. *Inner spirit of service.*

Pivotal Social Action Experience(s): Labor of Love/Rebuilding Together project with United Way.

Expectations/Goals: Common goals bring communities together (e.g., rehab homes of the needy in local communities). Identify needs. Standards for the project and qualifying homes applied. Help the poor, disabled, and elderly.

Lessons Learned: Avoid win-lose approach. Ripple effect will occur when engaged in social action; people pay it forward, others get involved. Communities come together. Ideas are *immortal*. Some individuals do take advantage of social services. People must be willing to learn from others; reciprocity. Humility. Trust needed.

Self-Awareness: Social action work requires one to be humble. Listen to others; consider for their voice. Trust must be established.

Category IV: **Response to Efforts with United Way (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)**

Themes: Culture: People from all walks of life need assistance. Linda sees the beauty and talent in all people and listens to their stories.

Gender: Strong gender roles initially influenced her career path.
Director of United Way: Treated with respect as a female leader. Never felt intimidated as a woman.
Author: The skill of quilting traditionally a gender specific craft/art. Women of the 1800s were the engineers, scientist, and mathematicians of their time. She shares this skill with boys and girls in schools todays, as she weaves her family stories into books and quilts and teaches them to do the same.

Other: Did not sense she was the Other. Recognized that some marginalized people in need felt ashamed of their circumstances; they were conscious of being the other. Must observe another's perspective; listen to their stories.

Inner-Conflict: Some individuals demand or expect social service assistance; ruthless, tricky, lie, cheat to take advantage of the system.

Category V: **Perceptions of Self and World: Woman (Praxis)**

Themes: **Context**: Illinois, US

Identity: A nurturer: a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother. Married for fifty-one years. Very devoted Christian Scientist. Volunteer and author. Grateful and confident woman. Explorer. Life's opportunities help one to become the person she/he grows to be. *Principled* person. Lived a *blessed* life.

World View: Life is tapestry of experiences. Sees the world more wholly now; good and bad. Believes the good/*light* will always outshine the bad/*darkness;* love for humanity is required. Everyone is unique and beautiful.

Category VI: **Transformation and Life Lessons (Praxis)**

Themes: **Transformation**: Once *stifled* and unable to fulfill her academic dreams, she found her confidence and obtained a college degree in her thirties. Free to make choices. Became a Christian Scientist. Became a leader and storyteller. Open minded and humble.

Lessons Learned: Life is tapestry of experiences**.** Every life is unique. All people have different challenges**.** Life continues on and on, infinitely. People must move forward. Life cannot be *manipulated*. Avoid winning and losing; one group cannot have power over another. One person can make a difference in the world. People cannot be afraid of what is different.

How Others Might View Her Efforts: Sharing the freedom of thought and encouraging that within others. Inspiring others to act. To be seen as an individual who valued elements of *divine direction*; a person who followed her heart, loved her family, and loved nature.

Personal Hopes: To help children find ways to express themselves freely.

Figure 9. Combines both the categories and the themes that were delineated from Linda's narratives and the characteristics or subthemes that were also extracted.

Summary of Thoughts

I never anticipated that through the course of my study, I would become so inexplicably linked to these female educators enacting social change. As I listened to their voices again and again, and raked over their words to illuminate their experiences and how they related to the perceptions of self, the world, and transformation, I found myself moved. I was emotionally drained at times realizing the awesome responsibility I had bestowed upon myself to tell their lived stories and deliver a depiction that was true and meaningful in each individual way. I failed to realize I would come to care for these women and be heartbroken at the fact that I may never speak to them again; I may never understand their full and final transformation as their lives continue to take shape without me. Moreover, I had not anticipated that by knowing them through my work they would become a part of my lived experience, my identity, my transformation. Thoughts of them lingered while I sifted through the interviews and processed the narrated lives of each woman I had encountered and what their experiences might mean to other educators. Chapter Five concentrates on the findings of this study and examines the themes across each woman's narrated experiences and the anomalies that came to light.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND THEMES

> *No one is born fully-formed: it is through self-experience in the world that we become what we are.* (Paulo Freire, 1921-1997)

As I continued conveying the lived experiences of these women, aspects of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis do seem to be the mélange that has constituted their transformation over the years. Perceptions of how they saw themselves and the world as young girls, juxtaposition with how they have come to see themselves and the world as adult women, are the arc upon which their social action experiences lay bare the very essence of who they are as human beings, as educators, and the transformation they have undergone. As we spent hours together during our interview sessions, specific themes surfaced relating to: familial environment and culture, self-perceptions, perceptions of the world, education, social action, culture, gender, Othering, and transformation. This chapter analyzes the nuances of each female educator's experience, as associated with these and the findings regarding the cross-case analysis.

Demographics of the Female Educators

The six women interviewed for this study ranged in age, from 27 to 72. Five participants were born and raised in the United States, while one was born and raised in Australia. One participant wished to remain anonymous; therefore, a pseudonym was provided in place of her full name (e.g., Madison); as well, any affiliate institution or organization she represented or worked with in the past or presently. Figure 10 outlines the demographics of the female participants of this research and their social change work.

It presents the portrait of their social change experiences and their transformation.

Figure 10. Demographics of female participants.

Female Educator Intellectual	Age	Nationality	Race	Ethnic Roots	Predominate Childhood Locale/ Geography	Social Action Work Locale(s)/ Geography	Profession/ Role During Social Change Experience (s)	Time in Field
Mariel Iezzoni	27	American	White	Italian	Pennsylvania, United States	Lukunur Islands of Mortlock, Chuuk Federate States of Micronesia	U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer	2 years
						Washington, D.C., United States	Exec. Asst. at the Initiative for Global Developme nt	2 months
Jillian Foster	31	American	White	Native American	California, United States	Washington, D.C., United States	Freelance consultant, Amnesty Internation al	4 years
						New York City, United States	CEO and Founder of Global Insight Internation al	4 years
						Washington, D.C., United States & New York City, United States	Founder of nonprofit, Feminist Dialogue	(7 years) 1 year official status
						New Jersey, United States	Adjunct Instructor of Gender Studies, Rutgers University	1 year
Jennifer Irizarry	37	American	White	Puerto Rican	North Carolina, United States	New York City, United States	Consultant, U.S. Human Rights Network	3 months
						New York City, United States	Consultant, TeachUNI CEF	1.5 years
						New York	Consultant,	1

						City, United States	MTV World	month
Female Educator Intellectual	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Race**	**Ethnic Roots**	**Predominate Childhood Locale/ Geography**	**Social Action Work Locale(s)/ Geography**	**Profession/ Role During Social Change Experience (s)**	**Time in Field**
Madison	41	American	White	European (nonspecific)	California and Florida, United States	*Midwest*, United States	Psychologist, Private Forensic Practice	13 years
						Midwest, United States	Author	9 years
						Midwest, United States	Exec. Dir. of Social and Behavioral Sciences Division and Dean of Online Programs (institution of higher learning)	2 years
						Rwanda and Zambia, Africa	Co-Developer of *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative*	6 years
Melinda Edwards	52	Australian	White	English Australian	Region of New South Wales, Australia	Brisbane, Australia	Litigator, Cooper Grace Ward Lawyers	4 years
						Brisbane, Australia	Professor and Asst. Dean, Queensland University of Technology	22 years
						Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Vietnam	Bridges Across Borders Southeast Asia Community Legal Education Initiative	3 years

							(BABSEA CLE) Volunteer	
						Kingdom of Bhutan	Founder of MeWise Pty. Ltd.	2 years
						Brisbane, Australia	Author	1 year
Female Educator Intellectual	**Age**	**Nationality**	**Race**	**Ethnic Roots**	**Predominate Childhood Locale/ Geography**	**Social Action Work Locale(s)/ Geography**	**Profession/ Role During Social Change Experience (s)**	**Time in Field**
Linda Brodine	72	American	White	Czech-Bohemian -Polish	Illinois, United States	Illinois, United States	United Way Regional Director	20 years
						Illinois, United States	Children's Book Author and Presenter	3 years

Figure 10. The demographics of each female participant will help to situate each woman within her lived experiences, negotiating situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis.

Data Analysis Process

The initial intent was to interview each participant three times using a semistructured approach. The Interview Guide Questions that served as my compass (see Appendix D) was integral in helping to establish the significant underpinnings of the female educators' perceptions of self, the world, and how each has transformed over time after engaging in social action change. However, only two of the women required the full series of three interviews. Most interviews ranged between 30-60 minutes each and were conducted via face-to-face, telephone or Skype video conferencing, since we were separated by state and country. After the interviews were completed, the transcripts were shared with each participant to ensure the conversations were true to form. In addition,

any corrections or edits could be made. None were necessary.

Throughout the data collection process, I utilized interim analysis (an ongoing, nonlinear process) of garnering artifacts, memo-ing, taking and reviewing researcher field notes, and examining the interview audio recordings and transcripts to consider each woman's perception of self, the world, and her potential transformation by triangulating the data (Green et al., 2006). Through an individual case analysis of each woman's interview transcripts, meaning units or themes were realized while open-coding the data (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Riessman, 2008). Some predetermined categories were anticipated before starting the interviews, such as: being the Other; culture and power and hegemony; the impact of feminist thinking and gender roles; the connectivity of transformative conditions related to identity (situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis); and obligation to engage in social action change (refer to Chapter Two, Literature Review). However, emerging categories surfaced that centered on unanticipated themes, such as: lessons learned, inner-conflict, the influence of religion, and ideals of *nurturer* yoked to gender. These themes and patterns are shared with depth in this chapter.

Through this process of segmenting each transcript to unveil meaning units (as shown in Chapter Four after each portrait), I was able to determine themes that were mentioned with high frequency, themes that were unique, and the outliers. Systematically coding in this way allowed broad categories and themes to be examined while subsequently, subcategories and subthemes also resulted and were documented in a master list. Enumerating the number of times specific categories arose helped to validate the presence of those themes. After noting the themes found in each individual's transcripts, field notes, artifacts, and memos, I was able to implement a cross-case

analysis to identify any clustering information, recursive patterns, and variations among the female educators (Green et al., 2006). In an effort to bring meaning to each experience and later across the educators' experiences, a thematic format was applied to organize the various themes (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Again, individual themes and patterns are shared later in this chapter, following each educator's portrait and transformation as stand-alone units of analysis. Figure 11 outlines the cross-case analysis of the qualitative research study. Potential implications within the education field and the social sciences or areas that require further exploration will be analyzed in Chapter Six.

When coding the data for individual and cross-case analysis, the following categories transpired:

- Childhood Perceptions of Self and World
- Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)
- Social Action: Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)
- Response to Efforts: (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)
    - Culture, Gender, Other, Inner-Conflict
- Adult Perceptions of Self and World (Praxis)
- Transformations and Life Lessons (Praxis)

Figure 11. Cross-case analysis: Categories and themes.

Category I: Childhood Perceptions of Self and World

Themes: Context	Positionality
Identity	Self-Efficacy
Situationality	World View
Subthemes: Location	Race
Time/Era	Ethnicity
Family Dynamics	Socioeconomic Status (SES)
Religion	

Category II: Self as Educator and Education (Praxis)

Themes: Definition	Agency
Subthemes: Personal Education	Being the Learner
Being an Educator	

Category III: **Social Action, Change Agent (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)**

Themes: Definition	Self-Efficacy
Context/Location (Situation and Positionality)	Agency
Date/Time/Era (Situation and Positionality)	
Subthemes: Driving Forces Towards Social Action	Lessons Learned
Pivotal Social Action Experience(s)	Self-Awareness
Expectations/Goals	

Category IV: Response to Social Change Efforts (Positionality, Situationality, Self-Efficacy, Agency, Praxis)

Themes: Culture	Other
Gender	Inner-Conflict

Category V: Adult Perceptions of Self and World (Praxis)

Themes: Context	World View
Identity	

Category VI: Transformations and Life Lessons (Praxis)

Themes: Transformation	How Others Might View Efforts
Lessons Learned	Personal Hopes

Figure 11. Combines both the categories and the themes that were delineated across all six narratives and the characteristics or subthemes that were also extracted.

Based on correlated quotes in each category, vertical themes were created for each individual (unit analysis) while horizontal themes surfaced across the participant pool. Context, frequency, cause and effect, and rationality applied to the data all aided in determining patterns throughout (Efron & Ravid, 2013). This thematic analysis across the stories helped me examine the commonalities, the differences, and the relationships among the different narratives.

The narrative approach lent itself to participant storytelling; oftentimes, the interview guide became part of the conversation in a very organic way (eliminating the necessity to ask each question). However, all elements of the questions were either posed to the participants or the participants offered answers while sharing their lived experiences. Data pertaining to each question did not always unfold in a sequential manner. Therefore, as the researcher, I found it necessary to review the data (both the audio recordings and transcripts) several times to be sure that all valid meaning segments (categories) correlated with the developing themes.

When looking closely at the individual units and the experiences of each participant (as noted in Figures 4-9 in Chapter Four), the themes and subthemes became much more narrow and specific. These themes, some emergent and some anticipated, all traced back to the original research questions relating to:

1. How the female educators enacted social change in the world.
2. How these experiences changed their perceptions of self and the world.
3. How the CTC might have played a role in their transformation.

Category I: Childhood Perceptions

To determine if in fact the educators of this study experienced a transformation after engaging in social action change, it was pertinent to explore the context of their lives while growing up. Influences of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, familial environment, culture capital, self-efficacy, and the era in which they experienced the world all mattered and shaped their identities. It might be helpful to revisit Figure 1 (*Connectivity of Transformative Conditions (CTC)* and Figure 2 *(Key Components of Connectivity of Transformative Conditions Defined)* to bring meaning to the terms and themes used throughout this chapter. Situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, praxis, and transformation became fluid dynamics interspersed throughout the various themes.

Perceptions of Self-Identity as a Girl

All six participants grew up in the United States except for one, Melinda, who has spent her entire life in Australia. The span in age of these women traversed 27 years *old* to 72 years *young.* Nearly every decade was represented through these women: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, while one woman was in her 70s. The era in which they grew up likely situated how they saw themselves and the world around them. Generationally, Linda, born in 1943, represents the *Silent Generation* or the *Lucky Few*; Melinda, born in 1963, represents the *Baby Boomers* (though she is Australian); Madison, born in 1974 and Jennifer, born in 1978, represent *Generation X*; Jillian, born in 1984 and Mariel, born in 1987, represent *Generation Y* or the *Millennials.*

When discussing the context of their childhood and how they saw themselves, the women did not mention race until I prompted them to share both their race and ethnic

background. However, race ended up being a primal component later in the interviews as they described their social action work amidst marginalized and oppressed groups of people here in the United States and internationally. All of the participants were of the ethnic White, female, persuasion. Although I was very interested in working with a racially and ethnically diverse participant group, it just so happened that all individuals who accepted my initial invitation to discuss the study were Caucasian.

All family units comprised of a mother and father; however, half of the women experienced the process of divorce through their parents. In the case of the three women who did not have divorced parents, one shared the complexity of gender bias displayed toward the boys/men of her family and physical aggression exerted upon the children, while another experienced several months at a time (throughout her childhood) without the company and influence of a father figure due to his work as a Ship Master or Captain.

I was curious to uncover the birth order of the women but it varied: three were the youngest of their siblings, two were the oldest, and Linda was the outlier as an only child. I identify with being the oldest (of five girls) and was curious whether or not similarities might exist among the participants who were also the eldest child in the family. Oftentimes, one's self-efficacy and the drive toward success are closely tied to birth order (Falbo, 1981). The data though positioned the women in varying birth orders among their siblings.

A pattern in the socioeconomics of their childhood families was predominately middle-class. Some posited this to be higher-middle class, working middle class, or lower-middle class. For example, most cited feelings of privilege; stating that they felt *fortunate*, *blessed*, or *lucky* to have had a life style void of the stresses and challenges of

poverty. It was interesting to learn how the affects of social dominance and culture capital started to infiltrate their positionality among peers at school or within their community. Jennifer shared that she felt like an "outsider" growing up because of living in an upper-middle class neighborhood and attending prestigious public schools, because her family was actually very middle-class:

> I felt like compared to other people, I never had enough or I was somehow deprived, which is interesting because I would later go on to reverse that feeling when I got more perspective. But yeah, I always felt like an outsider.

Madison commented on the irony of living a "superficial," extravagant life while her family was actually sinking in debt. When asked about the family's SES, she shared:

> I would say that one [question] is hard because on the surface, if people saw me they would probably think that we were upper-middle class by the cars that we drove, by the home that we had, but nothing was ever paid for. So, everything was always on loan, and checks bouncing, and all of that in my house . . . but nobody knew that on the surface.

Each female educator recalled some specific characteristics about the context of their upbringing and the values bestowed upon them (situationality) that then shaped their identity as a young girl that either heightened their sense of self-efficacy or dampened it. Some of these dynamics sprang from the overarching power of their parents' own fears, dreams, and attitudes, which manifested as encouragement, limitations, gender bias, or self-worth in the female educators themselves. What follows are example summaries:

Mariel: Always felt encouraged. Parents supported her and felt she could accomplish anything. Work hard to get ahead. No restriction on dreams or hopes, "The sky wasn't even the limit." Large extended

family and considered herself "lucky." Saw self as able, of value, and with potential. Wanted to travel.

Jillian: Strong, Mormon religious faith favored female gender roles. Felt like an outsider as a child because of faith. Saw mother struggling as a single mom. Extremely ambitious, student leader, and skier. Wanted to travel.

Jennifer: Mother escaped fundamentalist religious cult when she was a child. Masculine bravado at play; sexist household. Physically aggressive father. Republican, conservative, southern family. Gravitated toward environmentalism as a child; outspoken. Wanted to travel.

Madison: Little sense of self-worth as a child. Family valued superficial things; financial debt and strangers calling father or visiting home. "Bizarre" childhood; felt like a "zombie." Abandoned by her biological parents. Youth ministers took her in; new sense of self-worth and encouragement.

Melinda: Father often away at sea. Mother was paranoid and afraid of intruders. Prostitution was rampant in the port towns. Women were viewed as prey. Wanted to excel and please others. Gifted student and swimmer. Mother expressed limitations regarding gender roles and future career.

Linda: Grew up in the countryside. Felt alone and stifled. Strong gender roles valued: women got married and had children. Viewed self as

> "typical" child and enjoyed the outdoors, swimming, and playing piano. Traveled with family and neighbors within the United States.

The identities of each woman, in terms of how she perceived herself as a young girl, ranged. Mariel, Jillian, Jennifer, and Melinda all were very ambitious and possessed a strong sense of self-efficacy. Jillian and Melinda were leaders among their peers and stood out as athletes and students, despite the sporadic presence of their fathers. Linda and Mariel commented on having typical childhoods. Madison seemed greatly affected by the abandonment of her biological family; so too was Jillian by the divorce of her parents, and Melinda by her mother's expressive fears relating to potential rape and the prostitution witnessed in her neighborhood(s).

Perceptions of World: Worldview as a Girl

As we explored how the women viewed the world as children, it became evident that some saw the world as a "scary place," an "unsafe place," or feelings of fear or danger hung over them. In fact, four of the six women noted perceiving the world as such.

Jillian expressed, "My family didn't have enough money to travel internationally really. Because that wasn't necessarily an option financially, but then also there wasn't a huge desire because it was seen as scary and Other and dangerous in some way." Jennifer told a story of how she had to reconcile the racist sentiments her North Carolina friends made after she befriended an African American student:

> My most positive years were the 2 years that I lived in Dover, Delaware. I was maybe in sixth grade. I had a great teacher who impacted me a lot. And I think

> that was as far north as I've ever lived. So I could really feel the difference, because I remember moving back south after that experience and all of a sudden, I didn't have any friends of color anymore. It wasn't socially acceptable to have them.

Madison offered, in a somewhat guarded manner, "I saw the world as a very unsafe place, as a place where you just don't trust anyone because they can leave you at any moment, and a scary place."

Melinda reflected on her upbringing in Australia in port towns where shipmates would come and go:

> Where we were living in Port Kembla, I think there was a lot of prostitution. I think she [my mother] was afraid when we were living there because of the demographics of where we were—that young girls might have been in more danger. And I also think that's just because of the way she was brought up (and what I've subsequently learned happened to her as a young girl) she was incredibly protective with me. But as a result, like I couldn't walk along the street and put things in people's letterboxes because walking on the street by myself was dangerous. So I was brought up as a girl, believing I was prey.

In complete juxtaposition to those perceptions, were the views of Mariel and Linda. Their young girl perceptions of the world were *pure,* untouched by anything other than kind, gentle, and secure influences. As outliers, in regards to how they internalized the outside world, they described it with adjectives such as, "wondrous," "magical," and "sparkly." Figure 12 illustrates the themes pertaining to context, identity/self perceptions, situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, and worldview perceptions as the participants saw themselves as young girls.

Figure 12. Category I themes: Childhood perceptions

Figure 12. Combines the common themes of the transformed perceptions of self and the world as a girl delineated across all six narratives.

Category II: Self as Educator and Education

The role education has played in the lives of the female educators has proven to be pivotal in shaping them as adults. Their career choices, attitudes, and travels spawn from the personal education they have received and the educators they have become. Their individual views on education, both positive and negative, came to light while exploring the data throughout this research and offers further insight into their transformations.

Personal Education

Striating the data linked to what *education* and what *being an educator* meant to each participant was intriguing. All of the women had experienced postsecondary education after high school and had earned degrees in college or university. The oldest participant, Linda, who had grown up in the 1940-1950s shared that the women of her day were not encouraged to attend college. Although she excelled in high school and even took college preparatory classes, it was the cultural norm for women of her generation to graduate high school, get married, and start a family or join the workforce as a single woman. Linda married at age 19 and started a family; but with the support and encouragement of her husband, she went to community college in her 30s to earn an Associate degree. The value and importance of the participants' own personal education was a pattern among all of the women. Five women had degrees ranging from a Bachelor of Arts degree to multiple Master of Science degrees (two individuals earned two Master degrees), to a Master of Law degree, and one woman earned a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology.

Educator and Education Defined

Uncovering how each defined education and the role of an educator, patterns emerged around empowerment. All of the women saw the role of educator as a means to empower others and help make meaning of the world through personal stories and experiences. Another commonality among the women involves their belief that the role of *education* and *educator* could take shape in many ways, not just in a traditional classroom or school. Education was reciprocal, a give and take of knowledge. At times the *educator* became the *learner*, and in one case, the participant saw herself as an *explorer*.

The reality is that all six of the women actually have taught children and adults in some regard:

- Mariel taught schoolchildren in Micronesia in the U.S. Peace Corps.
- Jillian teaches graduate students.
- Jennifer has taught with the New York City Fellows Program in inner city schools and presents lessons in schools with TeachUNICEF.
- Madison teaches graduate students and African teachers.
- Melinda taught graduate students, teachers, and lawyers in Australia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Bhutan.
- Linda presents children's books and stories in schools.

In addition to these more traditional educator roles, all of the participants encapsulate my definition of educator as intellectual—one who uses a public platform to expose issues of oppression and becomes a face for those without a voice.

Figure 13. Defining educator.

Female Educator Intellectual (Participant)	Definition of Educator
Mariel	An educator changes others' perceptions; storyteller; all things are connected; empowers others to believe in self and sees personal value; invest in others.
Jillian	Daily interactions with people makes one an educator; creates a safe place to question the dogma; looks for others' motivations and patterns of behavior; unravels the patriarchal system of the world; asks probing questions; facilitates conversations; empower others.
Jennifer	It is a spiritual calling; a complex job. Educators help others uncover gifts and develop character. Anti-school, pro-education. Any relationship with another is an opportunity to teach and learn; we are all educators and learners.
Madison	Being an educator takes place in a multitude of ways. Ability to bring content to life in such a way that it can be ingested by students, of all backgrounds, and with various learning challenges, and learning strengths. Collaborative process, which requires a reciprocal exchange between learner and teacher. An educator helps students apply learning so they can give back in their own unique way to make a difference in the world. No ego.
Melinda	An educator empowers people; helps people discover the best versions of themselves. It is not the transmission of information but helping others find answers within themselves. Education is the key to social change.
Linda	Anyone can be an educator. A conversation, storytelling, or a life experience can be educative. Teaching is giving back to the world; paying it forward.

Figure 13. Each female educator intellectual's definition of what it means to be an educator.

Mariel explained that an educator is one who is "changing perception of how they [people] see themselves and their abilities; changing their perceptions about the world

that's in front of them or changing perceptions about the world around us." Investing in other people and connecting peoples' lives through storytelling was significant to her.

Jillian offered that she tries to create "a place where people can ask all sorts of questions and we can delve into that thinking and really understand the underlying reasons why we feel certain ways; believe or behave certain ways." It was made clear how important it was to her to allow people the space to "unravel the dogma and the haziness that is the world under a patriarchal system."

Jennifer presented a divergence in her views on education and schooling. An ethos was presented that *schooling* represented institutionalized learning whereas *education* was a creative thought process of discovery and learning that she embraced. Anti-school, but pro-education, she explained her feelings:

> [Being an educator is] like a spiritual calling because you are actually developing the character of people and you're uncovering gifts and you're helping other people understand who they are and what their gifts are. So I think it's a very complex job and I think there's a big difference between education and schooling.

Madison expressed the importance of collaboration and removing herself from the lectern. Student voice was equally important to her:

> I think that's always just been my approach of education, it's collaborative. I don't walk into a classroom ever thinking that I'm it. Students have something to offer me, as well, and I can learn a lot from them.

After being lawyer for some time, Melinda tried her hand at teaching law. She found this was her passion and engaged in teaching full time at the Queensland University of Technology. Her thoughts on being an educator were that it was "a gentler way of empowering people and maybe fleshing out ideas to make things better in some way" than the actual practice of law.

Linda categorized herself as an explorer rather than an educator. Yet, when asked *what* or *who* an educator was, she simply stated, "We all can be educators in different ways; just a conversation or [hearing] someone's life experience" can be educative.

Category III: Social Action, Change Agent

All six study participants were catalysts for social action change in the world. Their engagement in social action change took various forms. However, all of the women showed signs of self-efficacy, agency, and praxis. They had the *belief* that they could organize and execute their actions into desired results. They had the courage to *act* on behalf of those beliefs. They had the resolve to *reflect* on those actions.

Connecting the participants' agency to the research question, *How do female educators, as intellectuals, enact social change in the world?* it can be said that the women of this study all embraced giving voice to social justice issues by habitually and persistently spreading a message to others, for the sake of others. Their platform to act and bring light to oppressive issues that have befallen those who are marginalized, encapsulates their earned right to be considered female educator intellectuals. Figure 14 shows the markers for what, where, when, and how they enacted social change in the world.

Figure 14. Female educator intellectuals enacting social change: Most pivotal experiences.

WHO Female Educator Intellectual	**WHAT/ROLE Pivotal Social Action Experience Situationality/ Positionality**	**WHERE Social Action Work Locale(s) Geography/Context/ Situationality/ Positionality**	**WHEN Years/Context/ Situationality**	**HOW Agency**
Mariel Iezzoni	U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer	Lukunur Islands of Mortlock, Chuuk Federate States of Micronesia	2012-2014	Designed the Eight-Year Curriculum and Training Plan for U.S. Peace Corps Micronesia, Lukunur Island. Taught students.
Jillian Foster	Freelance consultant, Amnesty International	Washington, D.C., United States	2011-2015	Analyzes world issues as a Gender Specialist for military and police.
	CEO and Founder of Global Insight International	New York City, United States	2011-Present	Consults with nonprofit organizations and researchers to evaluate programs, conduct research, and problem-solve to achieve sustainable societal change.
	Founder of nonprofit, Feminist Dialogue	Washington, D.C., United States, & New York City, United States	(2009) 2014-Present	Creates a space for critical discourse around social barriers; feminist think-tank and collaborative activist group.
	Adjunct Instructor of Gender Studies, Rutgers University	New Jersey, United States	2014-Present	Teaches gender studies at a university.

WHO Female Educator Intellectual	WHAT/ROLE Pivotal Social Action Experience Situationality/ Positionality	WHERE Social Action Work Locale(s) Geography/Context/ Situationality/ Positionality	WHEN Years/Context/ Situationality	HOW Agency
Jennifer Irizarry	Consultant, UNICEF: TeachUNICEF, The Global Action Project	New York City, United States	2013-Present	Works with and teaches school aged children in New York City to raise the level of consciousness regarding African malnutrition and food security. Communications and media relations specialist.
Madison	Co-Developer of, *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative*	Rwanda and Zambia, Africa	2009-Present	Designs curriculum, teaches, and trains African teachers about the impact of trauma so they can effectively teach students and support their well-being.
Melinda Edwards	Founder of MeWise Pty. Ltd.	Kingdom of Bhutan	2013-Present	Trained internationally to empower communities and organizations to navigate complex issues through mediation and conflict resolution strategies using Alternative Dispute Resolution.
Linda Brodine	United Way Regional Director, Labor of Love/Rebuilding Together Project	Illinois, United States	1979-1999	Secured and organized volunteers to restore the homes of low-income families, the disabled, the elderly, and others in need of assistance.

Figure 14. What, where, when, and how the participants enacted social change in the world.

Social Action Defined

As the participants moved to define social action, some patterns arose around *being*. For example, five of the six women considered social action as a way of being in the world, a life style or calling. All six women noted that social action is reliant on building a community or collaborating with others in a reflective dialogue about the needs of the group or community. Three of the six women wanted to impress upon me the importance of *change* when engaging in social action while the others saw change as a *potential* outcome of their work. I found it fascinating that the three oldest participants (Madison, Melinda, and Linda) often spoke about the importance of putting their ego aside and exercising humility when engaging in social action work—particularly when collaborating with marginalized and oppressed individuals. Although most of the women saw social change as a collective act, Jennifer and Linda also mentioned, "one person can make a difference." Figure 15 shows all of the participants' thoughts in defining what social action mean to them; after, the findings are presented.

Figure 15. Defining social action.

Female Educator Intellectual (Participant)	Definition of Social Action
Mariel	Social action is something you believe in; a calling; a collective pursuit.
Jillian	Social action is creating a community/bringing people together; breaking barriers; learn and share knowledge; exploring feminism, women's rights, and equality; critical discourse. Working with nonprofits.
Jennifer	Social action starts with awareness and empathy, resulting in a connection to other people and other places. Choices made; personal, political, and economic. Ethics is a form of social action; how one lives life or a way of *being*. Being an *educator* or *activist* is not required. Internalizing others' stories.
Madison	Social action is leveraging others' skills with your own to effect change. Change is not *always* necessary. Leave a place better than you found it. Help people with their own needs, not your own. Must be self-reflective and collaborative. No room for ego; be humble. A responsibility. A way of *being*.
Melinda	Social change means *being* the change one wants to see in the world; a way of *being*. Being willing to be self-reflective and change self first. Sharing an experience with others to push past conflict to find world peace.
Linda	Social action comes from *within*, a *lifestyle*. It is the desire to help others within a community. One person can make a difference. It is one's atmosphere and actions and how one treats others.

Figure 15. Each female educator intellectual's definition of what social action means.

Mariel found social action to be something you believe in; "a calling"; a collective pursuit:

> Social action to me I think is finding something you believe in and making a call for other people to join you in that pursuit. And yeah, doing whatever you can to achieve that goal of whatever that calling is.

Jillian believed it meant creating a community/bringing people together; breaking barriers; learning and sharing knowledge; exploring feminism, women's rights and equality; and critical discourse. Working with nonprofits, "My social action is built

around bringing people together to have discussions and building community where there isn't one."

Jennifer posited that social action starts with awareness and empathy, resulting in a connection to other people and other places. Choices made—personal, political, and economic. Ethics is a form of social action; how one lives life or a way of *being*. Being an *educator* or *activist* is not required. Internalizing others' stories, she stated, "I think social action is about awareness first and empathy second and then that results in a feeling of connection to other people and other places around you."

Madison acknowledged social action to be leveraging others' skills with your own to effect change. Change is not always necessary, she admitted. It is leaving a place better than you found it. Helping people with their needs, not your own. Social action must be self-reflective and collaborative and there is no room for ego; one must be humble. It is a responsibility; a "way of being."

> I think with the first thing that comes to mind for me when you say social action, I think sometimes people all too often think it's about them and how they're supposed to be doing something to another to create change . . . But in order to do that, it takes a lot of humbleness and it takes a lot of thinking about what it is that country, for example, or those people need and how you can utilize your skill set but also leverage their skill set and their skills to be able to affect change. And I think that's the part that sometimes all too often we forget, or sometimes our egos get in the way and we don't know what else to do.

Melinda also declared that social change means being the change one wants to see in the world; "it is a way of being." It personifies being willing to be self-reflective and being willing to change one's self first. Social change means sharing an experience with others to push past conflict to find world peace. In Melinda's words:

> Social action to me means being the change you want to see in the world, like not just in a proverbial sense, but truly, so you have to live it. And then inviting others

> to share that experience with the goal (if it's meritorious and if it's authentic for them) that they will share in and go off and do.

Lastly, Linda offered that social action comes from within; "it is a lifestyle." It is the desire to help others within a community. She revealed that one person can make a difference; it is one's atmosphere and actions and how one treats others. Furthermore:

> I have felt so blessed through the years. From day one, I've enjoyed volunteering. Now I don't know where that comes from. It's something inside you. And you want to help other people. You want to nurture. Maybe it comes from my mothering instincts. I don't know. . . It's our atmosphere and our actions.

Pivotal Social Action Experiences

The social change efforts of the women of this study took place over a period of their lifetime and unfolded in many different ways and in many places. I was interested in having them focus on an endeavor that was most pivotal to them. In some cases, I later came to realize that the narrowing of this scope might have been too much to ask of the participants. Focusing on one pivotal experience proved most difficult for Jillian and was internalized that to pick *one* was to discount all others. As difficult the challenge, all of the other women were able and aptly ready to share the details of the experience most momentous to them. Figure 16 outlines the most pivotal social action experiences of all of the participants, including the context, the driving forces leading them to engage in social action, how the goals/expectations of their work came to be, and the lessons learned.

Figure 16. Category III themes: Social action, change agent.

Figure 16. Combines the common themes of Social Action, Change Agent (Pivotal Social Action Experiences) delineated across all six narratives associated with context, agency, driving forces, goals, and lessons learned.

Context of Social Action Engagement.

The context of the participants' work took place outside of the United States for three of the six women. However, all of the women worked with marginalized individuals in areas concerning poverty, disability, race, and/or gender inequality. Considering context, in terms of geographical location and era, half of the women engaged in work on an international level, physically outside of the United States between 2009 to the present (2015):

- Mariel in Lukunur Islands, Micronesia (South Pacific Ocean, east of the Philippines): 2012-2014
- Madison in Rwanda and Zambia, Africa: 2009-Present
- Melinda in the Kingdom of Bhutan (in the Himalayas between India and China, next to Tibet and Nepal): 2013-2015

The other half of the women engaged in work within the United States between 1992 to the present (2015). Jillian and Jennifer worked to give voice to marginalized individuals in urban areas such as New York City and Washington, D.C., while Linda worked with marginalized individuals in rural, suburban areas:

- Jillian in New York City and Washington, D.C., United States: 2009-Present
- Jennifer in New York City, United States: 2014-Present
- Linda in LaSalle, Illinois, United States: 1979-1999

Currently, all of the women remain engaged in some type of social action work. Jillian, Madison, and Melinda, have founded and established their own companies as a means to serve marginalized and oppressed individuals through social action. Five of the six women currently have employment or are self-employed with companies that strive to

benefit underserved and underprivileged people. The sixth individual retired doing this type of work as a paid professional with United Way. These women essentially always work on behalf of people in need. All of the women noted the significance of volunteering in some form or fashion throughout their lives as a means to serve others and engage in social change.

As the most pivotal social action experience was harvested from each participant, it became clear what themes surrounded their social action change efforts. Starting with agency, dominant themes such as the importance of empowering others, building community, storytelling, and engaging in critical discourse all surfaced when the participants described the success of their actions. Subthemes emerged in terms of their personal agency to enact social change; for instance, the *type* of action implemented resulted in teaching or training others, developing curriculum, and establishing a company that engages in such social action work.

Driving Forces.

The driving forces that moved the participants to engage in social action change work were all rooted in the anticipated theme of feeling *obligated* to give back. Although not all of the women mentioned having a life void of hardship, bias, or struggle (some, quite the opposite, actually), all but Jillian mentioned feeling they had either a "privileged life," a "blessed life," or attributed their work to "divine intervention." The desire to break social barriers and push past conflict in society was also a repeated theme, as was the desire to help/serve others who did not have the culture capital and social dominance to break down barriers on their own. Another driving force was the thirst to travel and learn about other cultures.

Expectations and Goals.

When exploring the goals and expectations the participants had before embarking on their pivotal experiences, Mariel was the only individual who expressed her naiveté and shared a story of visiting a friend in the Peace Corps before joining herself:

> I visited my best friend who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Paraguay in South America. And I saw the challenges that she was having trying to engage local community members who weren't really interested in being engaged. So, part of me was anticipating the challenges I would be facing of trying to really find mobility in the local community for a specific cause. We knew there would be challenges. But I also think I was more . . . my expectation was that I would accomplish more than I did.

Themes pertaining to goals and expectations were discussed by most as being "organic." In some cases, when the participants decided goals without the collaborative partnership and voice of the community they were serving, the project(s) fell flat or had to be redesigned with the people in mind and at the table offering input and guidance.

Madison shared an example of her short sightedness and the adjustments she and her team made in Rwanda with the, *Teaching Through Trauma Initiative*. Based on the research and focus groups here in the United States, she and her team created 10 curriculum training modules to teach African teachers about the impact of trauma on children. The following was the result after arriving in Rwanda with the first modules that were created without the collaborative partnership of the Rwandans:

> I learned so much about myself and being humble because at the end of the day, we threw out those 10 modules and had to start all over. Because it was less about me and delivering the 10 modules and more about listening to their [Rwandan] culture and their stories and the experiences of the genocide and how that's impacting them as teachers of children and also how it's impacting the children. That really shaped, I think, my now new worldview about what resiliency really is and what struggle and what people can overcome and what the country of Rwanda and its people has to teach us in the world.

This emphasizes the participants' view that goals and expectations must incorporate the needs of the marginalized or oppressed people they are working alongside of. The needs of a project (rather than a person), or self-serving needs, are simply not helpful in advancing the greater cause.

Both Melinda and Linda also discussed the significance of avoiding creating an atmosphere where someone has to be *wrong* to make another *right* or someone must *lose* in order for another to *win*. They offered that taking this approach causes conflict—conflict over a point of view, an approach, an action. All of the participants acknowledged that connecting to another's experience was essential in setting goals or outcomes.

Lessons Learned: Pivotal Social Action Experiences.

Lessons learned were a very personal exchange between the women of the study and me. I felt honored at each opportunity, listening to them share their experiences and hearing the vulnerability in their voices at times. Overwhelmingly, the women agreed that social action requires a collective, on some level. Linda and Jennifer were outliers, believing that one person "can make a difference." Many also made the supposition that solidarity among people and working toward a common goal creates a sense of community and breeds social change. Trust and humility were characteristics expressed by most as being needed in a change agent:

> Madison: This [Rwandan genocide, mass trauma] is much bigger than me; and I let my ego aside and I started to sit in those humble moments. I really wanted to make certain that I didn't do harm like

so many other people before me have [done], especially in that country.

Melinda: So, getting over my ego, my separateness, my need to look good, I think is more my sense of connectedness with the whole . . . the world—us healing ourselves and each other in the process.

Linda: You have to have humility to think to yourself, Well, these people probably know a lot more than I do and I could probably learn from them, which I did.

Understanding that various perspectives must be considered was also a theme that surfaced. Integrating those perspectives and different points of view inevitably informed the decisions made, the relationships that flourished or flattened, and the progress that was made or undone. Below are quotes illustrating this point.

Mariel opined:

> People are people wherever you go. So I think I have a much more real perspective of the world now . . . everyone has their own story. How do you explain that? Everyone has their own story and their own reality and their own truth that is just as real as mine.

Jillian offered her thoughts about perspective gaining and the impetus to create Feminist Dialogue. Feelings regarding the social barriers that she and her friends were met with gave her insight to open up a forum for discourse about gender bias in society:

> Oh, it's not just me. Oh, these things are happening to other people, and they're very similar and if we work together maybe we can learn and share ways to break down these barriers and then also build a community together where we can learn and share and do things together.

Jennifer expressed the importance of actually living among people different from

herself to gain perspective. She highlights her learning lesson after living and teaching in the Bronx of New York City:

> It was one thing to go to college and to learn about race, class, gender, all of those things. Theoretically, to understand it is one thing, but then to go into and actually experience that and to work and live among people who are so radically different from oneself, that was also a very big thing.

Melinda realized that the art of problem solving required perspective: "To be part of the solution, I need to work with every other person that's trying to, you know, make it work. And I need to be able to see things from their perspective."

Category IV: Response to Social Change Efforts

The context, including locale and time, proved to be vital elements of all participants' experiences linked to culture, gender, and Other; so much so that inner-conflict became a subtheme. Each of these elements are analyzed as they played out in the lives of the female educators acting as catalysts for social change. Figure 17 captures the various responses to the participants' social action change efforts as related to culture, gender, Other, and inner-conflict.

Figure 17. Category IV themes: Response to social change efforts.

Figure 17. Combines the common themes regarding the Response to Social Change Efforts delineated across all six narratives associated with culture, gender, Other, and inner-conflict.

Inner-conflict was an unanticipated, emergent theme that came out of the data. As each woman immersed herself in the context in which she worked, elements of

hegemony, social dominance and culture capital, gender bias, race, nationality, and historicity blanketed the experiences and influenced how others responded to them as individuals outside of their social niche. However, Linda seemed less aware or impacted by the influences of culture, gender, or Othering or being the Other in her social action experiences, as compared to her fellow participants in this study.

Culture

Analyzing how culture may have had a bearing on the women's social action experiences was complex. Mariel, Madison, and Melinda all were immersed in the traditions and cultural norms of another country (outside of their own) during their most pivotal experiences. Mariel took in the geopolitical framework of the Lukunur Islands of Mortlock in the Chuuk Federate States of Micronesia (South Pacific Ocean, east of the Philippines)—the lingering views of the island people who felt that a blueprint of the United States' governmental structure was placed upon their own Federate States of Micronesia. Madison absorbed the geopolitical framework of Rwanda—feelings of terror came out of the 1994 genocide for Rwandans and they felt the world simply watched and did nothing (one of President Bill Clinton's biggest regrets, Madison reminded me). In Zambia, Madison wrangled with the fallout of European-colonialism and the mistrust Zambians carried toward White people. In addition, Melinda maneuvered the geopolitical framework of the Kingdom of Bhutan in the Himalayas (between India and China, next to Tibet and Nepal). Considered the happiest place on earth, they struggled originally under British control (foreign and defense policies) and then Indian control.

Cultural themes among the experiences of these three women were most consistent to each other; however, there was clear overlap in how all of them experienced

culture in terms of being White women from Western or Developed Worlds (the United States and Australia). For example, the following themes were staples in their narratives related to culture in their social change work: White power (hegemony and social dominance), White privilege, White savior complex, the need to respect an opposite culture, nonconfrontational norms (save face, avoid embarrassing others), strong community bonds, religion, and the power of storytelling.

The presence of White privilege registered particularly in the experiences and social action work of Mariel, Jillian, Jennifer, Madison, and Melinda. Madison had to reconcile with the history of colonization in Zambia by Great Britain and Melinda had to grapple with the residual effects of the foreign and defense policies of the British in Bhutan. Mariel, Jennifer, Madison, and Melinda all alluded to a fear of perpetuating a *White savior complex* in the areas they served. They worked hard to cultivate relationships in the communities and situate themselves as equals among the nationals.

Jillian and Jennifer expounded on their observations of racial tensions here in the United States and the mistreatment of disenfranchised people (i.e., African Americans, Latinos, women, and the poor). Linda referenced the cultural imbalance related to disenfranchised people also but primarily considered the needs of the elderly, poor, disabled, and women. Linda explained:

> Sometimes I wish we can all be in a tunnel, dark tunnel, kind of groping around and somebody saying, 'Okay, now we need to be quiet, we need to hold hands, calm down, figure out what we can do for each other. We may or may not ever get out of here but there's got to be some way we can help each other and care for each other.'

She was careful to explain that she did not wish for society to be colorblind to one another's differences, but rather for people to acknowledge our humanity and recognize that humanity unites us.

Gender

The major themes pertaining to gender, as experienced by the participants of the study, were predicted: Double standards for men and women existed in society and the work place, women had little voice/input, race and nationality afforded the women more power and legitimacy (in various contexts), and a solidarity (unity) among women. Five of the six women observed—and at times capitulated to—being lower than men are in the hierarchical food chain. Whether living within their own culture (here in the United States or in Australia) or among another culture outside of their home country, they all witnessed an imbalance of power and respect paid to women on some level.

All participants relayed their concerns about the existence of a double standard in society for men and women. Men play by different rules and are given more freedom to pursue interests. Women are bound to a maternal-hood that society often coils around them; limiting their pursuits and how they can exercise freedom. Linda recalled stereotypical gender roles pertaining more to her personal upbringing than her social action experiences. Jillian cringed at the need to prove her "professional legitimacy" because she is a woman. Jennifer spoke passionately about feeling that as a woman—a mother to be more exact—she was restricted from fulfilling her true professional destiny, "I feel like mothers are fragmented people. They are constantly torn in as many different directions as they have children, and then their work, and then their husband, and then their families."

Considering herself engaged in social action work abroad, Mariel recognized that the Lukunur women were given little opportunity to share their voice within their own culture; however, she was afforded social power as a female because she was a White American. Madison faced the same situation in Rwanda and often had to subdue her urge to speak as freely as she normally did as an American. Melinda found that although she was respected as a female in Bhutan, admittedly, it was likely because of her Australian accent and the benefit of having a well-respected male colleague who had already forged trusting relationships with the people of Bhutan. In some cases, the participants of the study found that they were given the authority to speak on behalf of marginalized and oppressed women because they were viewed as being educated and/or having social status in part because of their race or nationality.

Other subelements relating to gender and violence stood out, but were insular in that they all took on different meanings and were referenced in different contexts. Jillian noted that masculine and patriarchal overtones were part of the identity construct of men in the United States. In her opinion, this societal construct has led to acts of violence on behalf of men. Jennifer referenced intergenerational violence and its role in her personal familial relations. Melinda described domestic violence being normalized in Bhutan, where she labored to implement the ADR model.

Other

The data showed the two variants when considering the Other: a) an individual is either the Other (or outsider) themselves within a group, community, culture, or b) represents individuals (as a group) seen as marginalized by society (e.g., those who are oppressed and lack social dominance and culture capital). In large part, the participants

felt they themselves were the Other (outsider) trying to make their way into a marginalized community. Patterns that materialized revolved around the need for relationships and trust to be built before enacting social change; respecting another's norms and culture, which was critical; the ability to see the world from another's perspective; the importance of listening to peoples' stories (historicity); being humble; being a learner; and realizing that language and accents can build or break barriers.

Mariel, Madison, and Melinda recognized being the Other themselves because of having different cultural norms, nationality, history, race, and language from those whom they were working with abroad in Lukunur, Rwanda, and Zambia, and Bhutan. However, each found that by building relationships and being humble, they were able to tear down those walls.

Mariel explained the shift after she learned the local Mortlockese language:

> Within two or three months, I was only speaking in the local language to my co-teachers. And I think it just helped bring a stop to them perceiving me as an outsider and start perceiving me as one of their own.

Madison tried to explain her Otherness as experienced in Rwanda and Zambia:

> But I also think it's a part of me being a White woman from America that is a bit interesting too. I don't know what it is, to be honest. I don't know that I can answer the question. I just know that I'm different.

She also reiterated the turnaround when she realized she needed to absorb the human experience of the Rwandans and listen to their stories and history:

> I think it's probably when I let myself just be, and I stopped focusing on what it was that I was supposed to accomplish—in the time that I was given from the school to be in Rwanda—and I started to focus on the human that was in front of me. It was less about my project and it was more about giving them the space and the room to be able to share their stories.

Melinda found that the abilities to laugh at herself and be vulnerable helped her to connect with the people of Bhutan. Again, the notion of humility and letting go of the ego superseded all else:

> When you're talking about ego you have to talk about yourself and you have to make fun of yourself for it to really connect with people. And that helped me a lot because I was unlike any of their other teachers.

Jillian and Jennifer saw the Other differently, at times. They both felt they were the Other, right here in the United States, due to their gender. Jillian observed:

> Because we're acculturated in a patriarchal society, all of us, even well-meaning men, can opt to silence women by speaking for them, which is really disempowering. So I think they have to be really careful.

At the helm of the United Way, Linda saw those living in poverty as the Other and noticed that they were often ashamed of their circumstances.

Jillian, as an outlier of this study, pointed out the mind-set of some Americans to view anything different and separate from America as "dangerous." This sense of the Other (those people) is scary for some. The unfamiliar provokes trepidation, though overall, this was not a theme emergent from the data.

Inner-Conflict

The women were all reflective and introspective, demonstrating a true sense of praxis regarding their social change work. The complexity of their thoughts resulted in a commonality that could be fleshed out as a worry in perpetuating the White savior complex and undeserved White power/social dominance, power (in general), and *balancing* of voice (when to speak up and when to be silent). The outlier pertaining to

inner-conflict came from Linda and revolved around individuals taking advantage of social services.

Mariel struggled with the self-imposed inferiority complex the Lukunur people bestowed upon themselves in her American, White presence (social dominance). She also worked to defend against Americans viewing the Lukunur people with pity or seeing her experience as the White people *saving* the poor people in other countries. “I came back from Peace Corps maybe frustrated. I felt very frustrated at times with how people would look at our pictures and see all of these poor little brown kids with no shoes.”

Jennifer, too, fights the White savior complex that she fears she might be feeding into while working with TeachUNICEF in New York City schools. Anticipating the feelings of the New York City teachers misunderstanding her desire to help those in the Sahel Region of Africa as opposition to assisting children in the United States. Jennifer said, “We don’t want to shove your development *porn* down our kids’ throats. We want them to have a multidisciplinary view or a multidimensional view of the developing world. We don’t want to perpetuate this White savior complex.” Looking back at the notes, transcripts, and recordings, Jennifer has an unabated anger that undergirds much of her narrative. Her inner-conflict acknowledges that her full potential may never be realized due to the societal pressures placed on women to be wives, mothers, nurturers, and caretakers.

Similarly, Madison’s inner-conflict was tangled in the “automatic power” sometimes given over in certain contexts based on race or nationality. Thinking about her work in Rwanda, she explained that one must be careful and avoid misusing such power and trust:

> Being a White woman comes with it the automatic belief that one is wealthy and powerful [at times]. And so, I think it's making sure, always keeping myself in check, about what it means to be White, and what it means to be White in that particular country . . .
>
> So I think it is important to be thought about at all times. And I think I was not prepared, probably in my own naiveté, I was not prepared for what it means to be White and the sort of power that can come with that because you're American and you're White. And I think some people can take hold of that and use that in all the wrong ways, and I think sometimes that's really easy to do. And so it's just constantly keeping yourself in check and making sure that what you're doing is always to the right of the people that you're trying to serve.

Jillian explained the delicate binary between speaking on *behalf* of others, while trying not to speak *for* others. The significance of listening to the oppressed and amplifying their voices still resounds in my ear. When asked how she felt about men being proponents of gender equality and speaking to the challenges that women face in the world—men trying to paint the portrait of what it means to be a woman and what a woman's struggles or triumphs are—Jillian replied:

> Really, I prefer men writing about equality when they are reflecting on their *own* masculinity, that process. You know, it's just like speaking for women but speaking for themselves and how *they* felt when listening to women. In that process they can say, 'This is what *I* heard. This is what *they're* telling me. These are the experiences I've observed and I'm observing this from my standpoint, as a man. And, 'What does that mean for me as a man?'

The masts of power trickled into Melinda's social action work as well, leaving her struggling with the imbalance of power oppressing women in Bhutan. This power imbalance between men and women acted as an opposing force against ADR, at times. Trying to mediate conversations about domestic violence in Bhutan while teaching peaceful conflict resolution requires an equal distribution of power among men and women in order to have healthy dialogue:

> One of the big issues with mediation is that where you have a significant power about, such as in a situation of domestic violence, mediation often doesn't work because it's a negotiation process and unless people have an equal power base, they can't negotiate as equals. So if somebody's been a victim of violence, they're never going to be able to have an interest-based negotiation with the person that's attacked them.

This was a challenge that weighed heavy on Melinda.

Linda's inner-conflict resided with the dishonest approaches that some marginalized individuals took toward social services. Linda expressed that some individuals took advantage of the social support system. Some pretended to be in need to cheat the system; some were rude, even "ruthless":

> You've got the one end where they're shamed, humiliated, mortified, they can't even lift their heads up because they're so humbled by being in need. Then you've got the other end where there are people (as we all know), they expect it. They demand it . . . They demand it and they are very ruthless, tricky, they lie, they cheat . . . And unfortunately, there is a lot of that out in the world today, and of course, you want to help the truly needy.

Linda, a person who looks for the beauty in all people, found this reality difficult. However, she was not blind to the fact that it exists.

Category V: Adult Perceptions

Figure 18 ties the themes related to transformation as a whole together. The sections that follow analyze the themes related to transformation of self-perceptions, world perceptions, and lessons learned. After, the following final two research questions are explored through the data in Categories V and VI:

2. How can the lived experiences of these women transform their perceptions of self and their worldviews, as a result of engaging in social action?
3. From the CTC perspective, how does transformation occur in these women's

lives?

Figure 18. Category V and VI themes: Adult perceptions, transformations, and lessons learned.

Figure 18. Combines the common themes of perceptions of self and the world, transformations, and lessons learned for the women delineated across all six narratives.

Perceptions of Self-Identity as a Woman

As grown women, the participants saw themselves as wiser, recognizing that they had gained much from their lived experiences in all capacities. All of the women commented on how their interactions with other people had taught them about themselves and shaped who they have become. All of the women linked their identity to their professional lives and the things they do in the world (agency). Mariel was the exception; "I would define myself as a caring, empathetic, strong woman that is not defined by *what* I do, but *who* I am."

Half of the women identified as being "nurturers" and likened that characteristic to a female trait. Being a woman translated into a sense of "unity" and "solidarity"—an understanding of walking a similar path, which all women shared during their interviews. Adjectives such as "strong," "confident," and "bold" were used when describing themselves today. Madison and Melinda made a special note and shared that they were no longer afraid of how other people saw them. Both Jillian and Jennifer identified with being feminist thinkers. Just as all of the participants' self- perceptions matured over time, so too did their perceptions of the world.

Perceptions of World: Worldview as a Woman

All of the women held a comparable perception of the world, calling it "messy" and "complex." It was clear that the world is "not black or white" nor a "right" or "wrong way" to approach situations. Mariel shared that she was more understanding of societal issues and the extent of her social action reach, once she realized that some things in life were out of her sphere of control. In the same vein, Jillian came to terms with finding comfort in the complexities of life. Jillian and Jennifer worked to gain an understanding

of why people behave the way they do and to recognize the patterns of those behaviors. Jennifer was firm in expressing that social dominance does exist and it is because of that power that others suffer oppression. Jennifer, referencing intergenerational violence and women's health care, posited that women essentially are in social and economic jeopardy all over the world.

Madison saw how the world could evolve through social change in a broader sense. She acknowledged that through a nation's people, societal change could take root. Such reformation starts with the mind-set of the children and hearing the collective stories of others. Melinda and Linda spoke to the importance of finding a peaceful resolution to world problems and the harm that making others *wrong* to be *right* can create. All of the participants highlighted the significance of context and listening to the experiences of others. Being able to process and internalize the perspectives of others based on their hardships and triumphs has enabled all of the women of the study to see the world differently as adults.

Category VI: Transformation and Life Lessons

Coming full circle, the actual transformation of the women of this study needs attention. To revisit the work of Freire (2000), the way a person sees one's self in the world directly correlates to his or her own position in the world. This perception is influenced by the context in which one grows up, experiences life, and interacts with others. As mentioned previously, the degree to which one experiences situations personally (based on their class, race, gender, or other distinctions) is essential to how all people deconstruct the world and see the self. The gains of such exploration come in the shape of self-actualization and an understanding of one's *position* (i.e., identity linked to

our social situation) in the world. Realizing one's *situated identity* is a process that takes shape over time and changes shape in each new context, thereby, validating that transformation takes place (Murrell, 2007). I posit that the interplay between situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis are present when one transforms (Bandura, 1995, 1977; Bruner, 1990, 1960; Freire, 2000). To repeat one more addendum, in the eyes of Shor (1992) and Giroux (1988), learning and social action result in the transformation of self.

Transformation

Through the female participants' lived experiences, the six women *have* changed. They all gave credit to seeing the world from another's perspective as enabling the process of transformation to take place within them. Other themes emerged, such as by actually seeing and struggling to understand and aid others they have come to understand themselves and the limits of their agency. They believe in their work, but most also acknowledged that even though social change starts with one person, it requires the masses. All of the women gave credit to others for their personal transformation—humbly admitting that the Others (the marginalized and oppressed) taught them far more than initially imagined. When considering their circumference of being, and how they transformed, each shared the following.

Mariel:

> And of course it's just a classic Peace Corps story of, well, 'I don't know how much I changed them but I'm certain that they changed me.' So I think that was what I really took away from that and that will continue to be a part of how I proceed in the future with my work as an artist. And as someone who works in international development.

Jillian, more of a realist, now feels that religion does not hold all of life's answers. She is more curious about the world and attempts to make sense of her experiences and how they relate to others across cultures, time, and place.

Jennifer explained that she takes the time now to consider multiple angles of a situation rather than siding with a political view or popular liberal view, "I question things more, you know what I mean? I don't just like believe the rhetoric."

Madison explained her personal transformation after working in Rwanda after the genocide as better understanding the kind of person she wanted to be:

> I think the first time that I went to Rwanda [2009] changed my life forever, and I'll never be the same human being that I was before then. . .
>
> And I think it was in that moment seeing myself and being in a way, I think forced into humbleness, that I think I became—I think no one's ever a perfect change agent, right? We're always learning, and adapting, and changing. But I think it allowed me to become more of who it is that I *wanted* to become, if that makes sense.

Simply put, Melinda shared, "The older I get, the more I appreciate the little I know." She further elaborated, "And now I'm more conscious than ever of how much I have to learn, how much I don't know about the way the world works, and how interested I am in other people's points of view.

Linda, concluded by referencing her transformation as an unfinished process of self-discovery:

> What I love about religion and learning more about one's true self is it keeps *uncovering*. It reminds me of an onion or a rose or whatever. You just sort of keep peeling back all these layers. And you may never ever get to the middle. It doesn't matter, because as you peel away these different layers, it brings the experiences and ideas.

Life Lessons.

All of the female educator intellectuals took the time to ponder the life lessons they have learned as a result of their personal transformation and how they have come to see the world. All of the women have come to realize the vital importance of embracing people's differences. By seeing the marginalized and oppressed as they are and treating them with dignity, they can find voice. Voice may grow into education, self-confidence, and the courage to share or discover one's own platform to encourage change.

The study participants learned that all people have similar needs and wants in life: safety, food, water, shelter, and happiness. A key theme in the lessons learned was conceding that change involves a process that takes time, relies on a common goal, requires trust, and relies and on the human capacity of others. Stories are the heart of the human experience. They are the one significant factor that shaped identity and perceptions of the world when the participants were young and changed those perceptions as they aged. Hearing the stories of others gave them perspective not only on their own lives but that of others in the world. Stories kept alive culture, history, legacy, pain, and values. These narratives have been the fundamental cornerstones in all of the participants' social action change experiences. With such perspective has come the gift of forgiving themselves for their own personal transgressions in life. They have found comfort in recognizing their own privilege in life and trying to channel that into a means to negate oppression, fear, hunger, sickness, and despair in the lives of others.

Reflections on Social Action, Self, and the World (Praxis)

The convergence of situationality and positionality in the context of the participants' lives (at different moments in time) created compassion and empathy for

others. This empathy and compassion for others was converted into self-efficacy, which set in motion the wondering, "What can I do for others in the world?" With the belief in their ability to organize and execute social action change, the women drew on this belief to act. Their agency spawned into establishing nonprofit organizations and companies of their own, teaching and training others on the topics of poverty, food deserts, trauma, gender studies, psychology, law, conflict resolution, mediation, general education, and the art of storytelling. Combined, they have traveled to developing third world countries to carry out their work and to impoverished communities in major cities within the United States. Their agency has helped bridge the divide between the marginalized and oppressed by speaking out as activists, educating others about human rights, and bringing social injustices to the surface for others to discuss and problem-solve. Through praxis, the participants' were able to reflect on their social action change experiences, thus resulting in the previously stated life lessons learned.

Connectivity of Transformative Conditions

Again, it was my hope to understand how the CTC might develop within the female educators during the process of social action toward change. Understanding how the conditions of situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis have come together to constitute identity and perceptions of the world—thus transforming the participants in their quest for social change—was a goal of the research.

Figure 19 weaves together the variables that constitute one's transformation over the years based on the experiences of the female participants, where they came from, and what they have accomplished through their social change efforts.

Figure 19. Connectivity of Transformative Conditions (CTC) Realized.

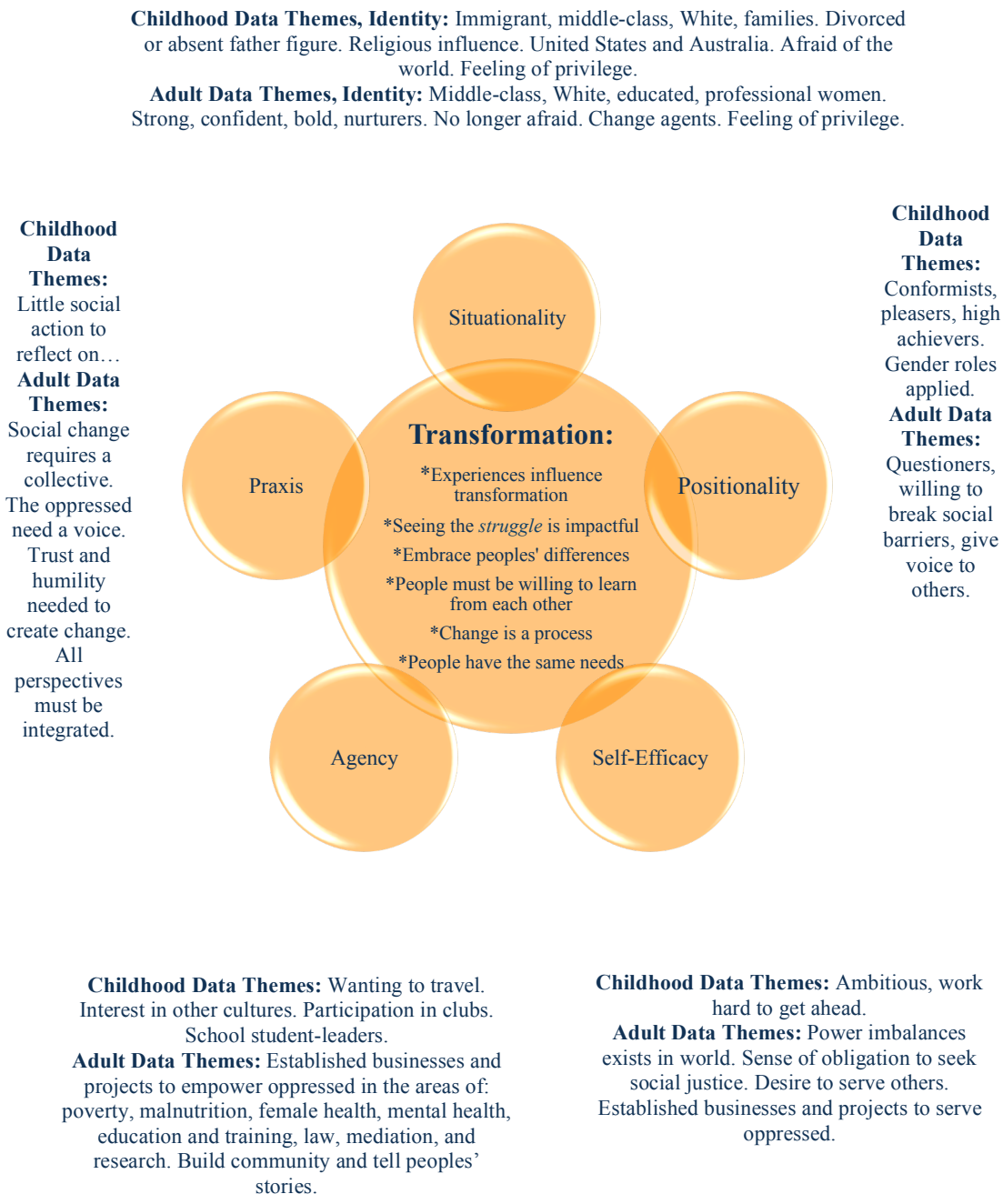

Figure 19. Transformative conditions realized based on the experiences of the participants. One's identity and perceptions of the world through situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis result in transformation (reference Figures 12, 16, and 18).

Over time, each participant has evolved seeing the world and themselves differently. I would argue that to take any one condition away—situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, or praxis—each woman's current view of herself and the world around her would be different. For instance, to take away one's situational elements either as a child or as an adult would completely change the context in which she lived or worked. Doing so thereby changes the geopolitical influences of that locale, the gender-lines that may or may not have existed, the culture of that place, and the inherent power structures at play, which all collide to shape that individual's identity.

Additionally, to take away one's positionality would discount her identity, race, gender, traditions, culture, community role(s), and authority. One precedes the next. To ignore self-efficacy would be to strip away a person's belief in self to accomplish a task. Self-efficacies power (confidence to organize and execute actions) is an outgrowth of both situationality and positionality. Together, situationality and positionality manifest internally to offer one the fortitude to push past trials and leap off the back of success to give life to one's thoughts. Actually putting those organized beliefs into action for a desired purpose is the naissance of agency (acting). If any of these women lacked agency, their social actions would have never come to be. The lessons learned during those experiences regarding culture, gender, Other, and inner-conflict would have never been realized. The reverberations from those lived experiences emergent as a result of such social action would be unrealized. Then, of course, praxis (reflecting on agency) would be naught.

Suffice it to say, all of the women had profound reflections regarding their lives, their agency to thwart social injustices, and their changing self-perceptions and

worldviews. Looking over the data, especially that of Figure 17 (*Response to Social Change Efforts*; e.g., context, culture, gender, Other, and inner-conflict) parallel with Figure 18 (*Adult Perceptions, Transformations, and Lessons Learned*) and Figure 19 (*Connectivity of Transformative Conditions Realized*), it seems responsible to state that if any one of the CTCs—situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis—were changed, a transformation would likely still take place. However, the result would be altered. The transformation transformed. The person would be changed (different) but nonetheless still transformed; each condition, effectively its own state of fluidity, temporal, and unfixed. Yet, like gears, they grind against one another creating enough friction and motion to cast a mold of identity, of being in the world. Yes, these conditions do exist within each of the women of this study and have played a role in her transformation over time.

Summary of Thoughts

The data presented in this chapter constituted the major themes and subthemes encapsulating the experiences of the six female educator intellectuals enacting social change. Based on the context from which the participants came from (e.g., their families, where they grew up, their own cultural norms, and values) gave way to the path they took in life. In some cases, their upbringing pushed them to pursue very different life experiences than they knew as children. The situations they were born into, the communities where they grew up, where they worked as a catalyst for social change, and where they live now, all gave way to the emergence of various positionalities based on those changing contexts. At times, their social power was diminished or heightened based on their race and nationality, thus provoking and inviting habitudes that were specific to

that situation. As power shifted, so did their self-efficacy and the belief that they could inspire change.

As I examined the patterns of this study, it became clear that all of the women exercised agency throughout their lives. They have acted in ways that were responsive to community needs around the globe and have looked inward to assess their motives, their actions, and the outcomes. Furthermore, they have revealed their vulnerabilities and moments of self-doubt; they have shared their own anger and pain; they have wrestled with their own sense of privilege and obligation to help those who are oppressed; they have been humbled by the experiences both within and outside of the United States. As earlier stated, perceptions of how they saw themselves and the world as young girls, juxtaposed with how they have come to see themselves and the world as adult women, are the arc upon which their social action experiences lay bare the very essence of who they are as human beings, as educators, and the transformation they have undergone.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

> *The intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public.* (Said, 1994, p. 11)

Chapter Six highlights the findings within and outside of the context of the literature, while considering the meaning, limitations, and implications of the findings to the education field and the social sciences. A reflection of my own personal growth throughout this research process and conclusions are also tendered. The essential questions, at this juncture in the study, follow:

- *How are the findings linked to the literature and how might they stand apart?*
- *What is significant, important, and meaningful about the findings resulting in implications?*
- *What future research is critical to the education field and the social sciences?*

By exploring these questions—as linked to the literature explored in Chapter Two—the portraits of Chapter Four, and the findings in Chapter Five, similarities, new understandings, and contradictions, come to light as implications. Within these similarities and contradictions, epistemology is both reborn and reformed (Lukenchuk, 2013).

Revisiting the Research Questions

Although each research question has been deconstructed throughout the study (beginning with the deeper meaning implied through the literature review, the methodology of the research, and then through portraits and findings), I felt it pertinent to

state simply the results of each before introducing the findings in the context of the literature, the implications of the findings, and the recommendations for future research. Chapter Five offered the robust findings regarding the following three research questions that drove this study. After, succinct findings (as written in Chapter Five) are presented that will position the implications and the potential future research.

1. *How do female educators, as intellectuals, enact social change in the world?*
    - The social change efforts of the women of this study took place over a period of their lifetime and unfolded in many different ways and places.
    - The female educator intellectuals identified as professors, psychologists, lawyers, activists, teachers, trainers, nonprofit associates and founders, authors, and/or volunteers.
    - A common interest in bettering the human condition was held by all.
    - A driving force for each was rooted in an obligation to act or to serve, due in part to their own circumstances in life, which they viewed as privileged.
    - The women of this study all embraced giving voice to social justice issues by habitually and persistently spreading a message to others, for the sake of others.
    - Their platform to act and bring light to oppressive issues that have befallen those who are marginalized, encapsulates their earned right to be considered female educator intellectuals.
    - The context of the participants' work took place outside of the United

States for three of the six women. However, all of the women worked with marginalized individuals in areas concerning poverty, disability, race, and/or gender inequality.

- Considering context, in terms of geographical location and era, half of the women engaged in work on an international level, physically outside of the United States between 2009 to the present (2015):
    - Mariel in Lukunur Islands, Micronesia (South Pacific Ocean, east of the Philippines): 2012-2014
    - Madison in Rwanda and Zambia, Africa: 2009-Present
    - Melinda in the Kingdom of Bhutan (in the Himalayas between India and China, next to Tibet and Nepal): 2013-2015
- The other half of the women engaged in work within the United States between 1992 to the present (2015):
    - Jillian in New York City and Washington, D.C., United State: 2009-Present
    - Jennifer in New York City, United States: 2014-Present
    - Linda in LaSalle, Illinois, United States: 1979-1999

2. *How can the lived experiences of these women transform their perceptions of self and their worldviews, as a result of engaging in social action*
    - As grown women, the participants saw themselves as wiser after engaging in social action change.
    - By admission, the participants' interactions with other people taught them about themselves and shaped who they have become.

- All of the women linked their identity to their professional lives and the things they do in the world (agency).
- Half of the women identified as being "nurturers" and likened that characteristic to a female trait
- Being a woman translated into a sense of "unity" and "solidarity"—an understanding of walking a similar path.
- Adjectives such as "strong," "confident," and "bold" were used when describing themselves today.
- All of the women held a comparable perception of the world calling it "messy" and "complex.
- The world is "not black or white" nor is there a "right" or "wrong way" to approach situations.
- The realization that some things in life were out of one's sphere of control and finding comfort in the complexities of life, emerged.
    - Some participants found meaning in trying to understand why people behave the way they do and recognizing the patterns of those behaviors.
    - Others acknowledged that it will be through a nation's people that societal changes can take place.
    - Another shared that bias and violence toward women needs to be addressed around the world.
- Social change reformation starts with the mind-set of children and hearing the collective stories of others.

- Finding peaceful resolutions to world problems was viewed as important.
- All of the participants highlighted the significance of context and listening to the experiences of others.
- Being able to process and internalize the perspectives of others based on their hardships and triumphs has enabled all of the women of the study to see the world differently as adults.

3. *From the Connectivity of Transformative Conditions' perspective, how does transformation occur in these women's lives?*

Transformation

- Through the female participants' lived experiences, the six women have changed.
- All women gave credit to seeing the world from another's perspective as enabling the process of transformation to take place within themselves.
- By actually seeing and struggling to understand and aid others, they have come to understand themselves and the limits of their agency.
- Social change starts with one person but requires the masses.
- All of the women gave credit to others for their personal transformation, humbly admitting that the Others (the marginalized and oppressed) taught them.
- Life lessons: Realizing the vital importance of embracing people's differences; the importance of seeing the marginalized and oppressed as

they are and treating them with dignity; allowing all voices to be heard; all people have similar needs and wants in life: safety, food, water, shelter, and happiness.

    - Key theme in the lessons learned was conceding that change is a process that takes time, relies on a common goal, requires trust, and the human capacity of others.

- Stories are the heart of the human experience.
    - Stories are the one significant factor that shaped identity and perceptions of the world when the participants were young and changed those perceptions as they aged.
    - Hearing the stories of others gave them perspective not only on their own lives but that of others in the world.
    - Stories kept alive culture, history, legacy, pain, and values.
    - These narratives have been the fundamental cornerstones in all of the participants' social action change experiences. With such perspective has come the gift of forgiving themselves for their own personal transgressions in life.

Connectivity of Transformative Conditions

- The convergence of situationality and positionality in the context of the participants' lives (at different moments in time) created compassion and empathy for others.
- Empathy and compassion for others was converted into self-efficacy, which set in motion the wondering, "What can I do for others in the

world?"

- With the belief in their ability to organize and execute social action change, the women drew on this belief to act.
- Agency spawned into establishing nonprofit organizations and companies of their own, teaching and training others on the topics of poverty, food deserts, trauma, gender studies, psychology, law, conflict resolution, mediation, general education, and the art of storytelling.
    - Combined, they have traveled to developing third world countries to carry out their work and to impoverished communities in major cities within the United States.
    - Their agency has helped bridge the divide between the marginalized and oppressed by speaking out as activists, educating others about human rights, and bringing social injustices to the surface for others to discuss and problem-solve.
- Through praxis, the participants' were able to reflect on their social action change experiences (previously stated life lessons learned have resulted).
- Weaving together the variables that constitute one's transformation over the years, based on the experiences of the female participants, where they came from, and what they have accomplished through their social change efforts, established a connectivity of conditions.
- Over time, each participant has evolved seeing the world and

themselves differently.

- To take away any one condition—situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, or praxis—each woman's current view of herself and the world around her would be different.

  For instance:

  - To take away one's situational elements, either as a child or as an adult, would completely change the context in which she lived or worked—thereby changing the geopolitical influences of that locale, the gender-lines that may or may not have existed, the culture of that place, and the inherent power structures at play, which all collide to shape that individual's identity.
  - To take away one's positionality would discount her identity, race, gender, traditions, culture, community role(s), and authority. One precedes the next.
  - To ignore self-efficacy would be to strip away a person's belief in self to accomplish a task. The power in self-efficacy (confidence to organize and execute actions) is an outgrowth of both situationality and positionality.
  - Together, situationality and positionality manifest internally to offer one the fortitude to push past trials and leap off the back of success to give life to one's thoughts. Actually putting those organized beliefs into action for a desired purpose is the

naissance of agency (acting).

- If any of these women lacked agency, their social actions would have never come to be. The lessons learned during those experiences regarding culture, gender, Other, and inner-conflict would have never been realized.
- The reverberations of praxis from those lived experiences, emergent as a result of such social action, would be unrealized. Then, of course, praxis (reflecting on agency) would be naught . . . and so too would inner-conflict and life lessons.

- All of the women had profound reflections regarding their lives, their agency to thwart social injustices, and their changing self-perceptions and worldviews.
- Looking over the data, it seems responsible to state that if any one of the Conditions of Transformative Connectivity—situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis—were changed, a transformation would likely still take place; however, the end result would be altered.
  - The transformation transformed
  - The person would be changed; different, but nonetheless still transformed with each condition effectively its own state of fluidity, temporal and unfixed.
  - Each condition impacts the other casting a mold of identity, of being in the world.

- Yes, these conditions do exist within each of the women of this study and have played a role in her transformation over time.

The following sections will analyze the findings within and apart from the literature in the areas of:

- Education and Educator Aspirations
- Transformation Realizations
- Feminist Theory Reified with Culture and Power

Implications of the study, such as Transforming from the Inside Out and Education to Incite Critical Consciousness lead to Limitations of the Study, Recommendations for Future Research, and My Personal Journey and Conclusions of the research.

Findings Within and Apart From the Literature

The excerpts hereafter interlace the findings of this study with conceptions in the education field and the social sciences related to education, transformation, feminist theory, culture, and power. Substructures discovered in the research are paralleled with common understandings while other ideas are challenged. I retrace and reconfigure some of my own thinking because of my discoveries during the research process.

Education and Educator Aspirations

I have stated in previous chapters that educator intellectuals have the potential not only to transform personally, but to also transform others by way of reshaping the meaning of the lived experiences of others—some may be intended consequences, while others may be unintended, perhaps. As so many educators, professors, and writers have expressed, educator intellectuals expose issues of oppression and become a voice *with* and *for* those who are marginalized, often shifting the social, cultural, and/or political

alignment of the world, much like the participants of this study (Apple, 2013; Arendt, 1968; Giroux, 1985; hooks, 2010; Mohanty, 2003; Naples & Desai, 2002; Shor, 1992).

The study participants have worked in various educator capacities, such as teacher, professor, trainer, lawyer, volunteer, nonprofit CEO, psychologist, author, consultant, and presenter. They have devoted time to a range of causes in an effort to raise social awareness toward human rights and well-being. By uncovering how each defined education and the educator's role, patterns surfaced of empowerment. All of the women saw the educator's role as a means to empower others and help make meaning of the world through personal stories and experiences. Hannah Arendt's (1968) views apply in that the work of these female educators has not only transformed them personally, but *they* have transformed Others' meaning structures as well. The advancement of their work and its sustainability in various places around the world, such as New York City, Micronesia, Bhutan, Rwanda, Zambia, and the suburbs of Illinois, proves this.

Educators have the opportunity to engage in critical discourse and action to awaken the human spirit. I would posit that the women of this study have done that not only in classrooms but in communities. Ira Shor (1992) explained that critical thought involves challenging the boundaries of the world. The study participants have pursued transcendental change because they have helped people—whole communities, at times—"examine familiar situations in an unfamiliar way" (Shor, 1992, p. 93). They have helped whole villages understand the impact of genocidal trauma on African children. They have restored the homes of the elderly, disabled, poor, and disenfranchised. They have fostered a climate of harmony through conflict resolution in communities that once avoided difficult conversations. They have created plans for the future of educating

youth. They have taught about food security in their own cities and the relationship to food security in other countries. They have moved communities to aid in their cause, to help problem-solve, to maximize resources, and sustain these efforts in their absence. They have created *meaning* and *purpose* in the lives of others. This is the mark of an educator (Bandura, 1977; Bruner, 1960, 1990; Collins, 2013).

Transformation Realizations

Considering the thoughts put forth by Pierre Bourdieu (1990) referencing one's transformation, he claimed that a person's habitus comes from one's beliefs and values stemming from class, family, community, and peers (Michelson, 2012). It has been suggested in the literature and in former research that one's habitus can be limiting (Bourdieu, 1977; Mills, 2008). Although Bourdieu further opines that cultural rules stemming from one's habitus of upbringing typically manifest in our lives as we age, it seems that the participants of my research are exceptions. Although most of the female participants came from homogeneous backgrounds (regarding race and class), with a primary focus from parents to raise a family close to home, most of the women sought social action endeavors with people of various creeds, color, and needs, far from where they grew up. They pushed past the boundaries of their hometowns even when it was considered taboo to forge into the *scary* and *dangerous* world. Raging against the predictable reproductive habitus of their families, they gravitated toward a transformative habitus in new places with unforeseen experiences awaiting them (Bourdieu, 1977; Mills, 2008).

The female educator intellectuals engaging in social action came to see themselves *differently* in the world. They understood that they were *of privilege*, meaning

they had the luxury of civil human rights, social capital due to race, democracy, food, shelter, and safety. Although many of the women acknowledged their "blessed," "fortunate," or "lucky" life as a younger person, they became certain of it as an adult after having witnessed real oppression in their work. Just as Paulo Freire (2000) noted:

> People develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 83)

As the women saw themselves in the villages of the Lukunur Islands in Micronesia, Rwanda, Zambia, Bhutan, and in New York City and the suburbs of Illinois, the up close and personal experiences with poverty, malnutrition, trauma, conflict, gender bias, and other calamities, enabled them to see not only themselves in transformation but the world around them.

A connection can be made to Jack Mezirow's (1991, 1997) claim that an individual's experiences in the world gives way to specific associations, feelings, concepts, values, and conditioned responses, which he referred to as a frame of reference. The women of this study absorbed a new frame of reference over time. Through their social change work, it gave way to new points of view, new meaning structures, and even inner-conflicts such as a fear of perpetuating a White savior complex, discomfort with undeserved social power as a result of their race, and maintaining a balanced voice (when to speak out and when to follow cultural norms). The women gained the ability to interpret their experiences (apply specific beliefs, value judgments, and feelings) based on their prolonged periods within a culture and based on individual praxis/reflection of their social action.

This transformation, personified by the *Theory of Perspective Transformation,* is symbolic of high levels of self-awareness, as previously explored through Mezirow's work (1996, 1997). As a result of such perspective transformation, the women of this study were able to articulate inner-conflicts and life lessons such as:

- the need to establish a collective effort to influence change;
- giving marginalized and oppressed individuals the opportunity to be collaborative with the work; the importance of earning trust;
- being humble; and
- integrating various perspectives into their social change work.

Feminist Theory Reified with Culture and Power

The common pivot points of identity for all of the participants' were gender, race and socioeconomics. The participants—White, middle-class, females ranging between ages 27 and 72—all experienced the weight of gender roles in some fashion. The eldest participant experienced second-wave feminism focused primarily on issues related to job equality, sexuality, reproductive rights, and family roles in the 1940s-1960s (de Beauvoir, 1978; Rosen, 2006). She however, was raised with very limiting expectations as a girl passed down from her parents (i.e., marry and start a family). I was not surprised that the other participants were aligned to second-wave and third-wave feminist trends, given the era in which they were born. The prominent factor in third-wave feminism that really encapsulated the work of the participants' was the draw to emancipate marginalized individuals on a global scale (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Rosen, 2006; Rothenberg, 2004).

Most of the participants mentioned their own personal challenges to engage in social action work as a female, while also being the Other in a culture outside of their own. However oftentimes, due to their race, they were afforded more social capital than the local women they collaborated with while engaging in their work. This supports the work of Mohanty (2003) and others who claim that Western thinking about feminism often points to a White privileged, United States-colonial or Eurocentric approach to female oppression. Alexander and Mohanty (1997, 2010) have claimed that this could impede rather than advance the dialogue and action to support marginalized women and women of color, both within the United States and outside the United States (Ali et al., 2000; Pratt & Rosner, 2012; Swarr & Nagar, 2010).

For those participants who worked in third world countries (emergent nations reliant on First-World nations or the geographic Southern hemisphere), such as Rwanda, Zambia, Micronesia, and the Kingdom of Bhutan, the concept of Transnational Feminine Theory was confronted. In these cases, the study participants had internal struggles to resist their socially constructed ideals of new-age feminism as an American or Australian. These participants, though honorable women, did at times portray the local women as victims of geographic circumstance and hegemony in the narratives they told (Mohanty, 2003). The humanist in me, however, must reiterate the devotion all participants had toward the women they worked with while engaging in social action. In addition, the participants also exuded the utmost respect for these women.

I cannot help but to wonder in what ways the participants of my study (myself included) might have inadvertently supported a White privilege dynamic while engaging in social action causes based on the pure nature of our race. Should it be that we refrain

from our work or continue in the spirit of solidarity in the hopes that as a *human race*, we can overcome transgressions of the past and present? I cannot be swayed to act otherwise. I cannot be convinced that working to empower the marginalized and oppressed is disadvantageous. I believe that by exerting pressure against the lines of color, especially as a White woman, a place exists for me to stand alongside my sisters and brothers of all colors, religions, and backgrounds—not only to demonstrate my own intolerance for social injustice, but also to advance education and solidarity among all women and men.

Michael Apple (2013) declared that, "A society that does not recognize itself around the norms of love, care, and solidarity and does not engage in successful struggles over these forms cannot be considered truly serious about equality" (p. 16). The study participants are female educator intellectuals who do the best they can, every day, as regular people to seek such equality. Consequently, they too acknowledged the importance of solidarity and nurturing but positioned them as gender-specific characteristics.

Hannah Arendt (1968) defined education as the moment "at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it" (p. 196). In the research, the participants all embraced this notion of responsibility, portraying a deep sense of caring about the condition of the world and the people inhabiting it. As Ali et al. (2000) claimed in their work, feminists are searching for transformation on a large and small scale, both within and outside of themselves. Situated within my work as feminist thinkers, these women have not asked to be labeled or defined in any particular way, but they have assumed responsibility for doing their small part, during their short lifetime(s), to contribute to the world in a positive manner.

Implications of the Study

As an educator myself, I sometimes wonder if my work matters in the greater context of the world. I speculate that some of my interactions with adults, students, and parents will have a lasting effect on how they see themselves and how they, too, might be able to impact another. But the truth is, in most cases, I will never know. Our paths meet and then they diverge in separate directions (for the most part) as their life's journey moves them forward and away. Yet, it is in the belief that even in the shortest glimpse of time that we may spend together, that a possibility exists that we can learn from one another; thus transforming our thoughts, our approach to situations, and how we may live our lives.

Transforming from the Inside Out

My hope at the onset of this research was that by examining social change linked to transformation, this study could expand the education field and the social sciences by establishing a better understanding of whether such change is primarily an internal process (changing an individual's perceptions) or an external process (changing a social situation in a community). The data has shown that the participants believe that the impact of their social action experiences on their own personal transformation (the internal changes to the self) was far greater than the results of their social action on society (the external changes to a community). I marvel at the humility embedded in this discovery. As a researcher, I would have guessed that the societal impact of their social change work would have been viewed as equally important.

The study participant's transformations have reaffirmed for me the power of relationships with people and the experiences that build our personal stories, our being,

our identity. Their interactions through social change efforts have reaped change in the world, but perhaps more importantly, have changed how they see themselves as women and their perceptions of the world at large. The dynamic forces of context and situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis do lead to a transformation. This demonstrates the capability that lived experiences have to reinvent our mind-set, self-efficacy, views, and ability to be a catalyst for social change. Once one understands him- or herself and where he or she comes from, one can consider where he or she wants to go. Getting there—the struggles, the hardships, the triumphs, and the learning—changes who we are from the inside out.

Education to Incite Critical Consciousness

Although Albert Bandura (1995) mentioned that overwhelming social issues sometimes cause a paralysis in people, this notion was far removed from the women of this research. This thinking did not inhibit the women, though at times, they admitted doubting their abilities and their resiliency to persevere. Certainly, the pressure to move a social cause forward was daunting at times, but they tried—organizing, collaborating, and committing. Exercising agency, they acted. Strengthening their self-efficacy, they persisted. Being human, they sometimes failed, yet these personify the characteristics of an educator. Teaching others that risk and failure are part of the learning process makes for an evolving and learning society.

Although it was not my sole intent to argue for the place of social action in our schools in the form of curriculum revisioning, I certainly support it. Finding ways to illuminate social justice issues around the world and close to home remain critical to

learning. As George Counts (1932) shared, educators do have the power to influence social attitudes:

> Teachers should deliberately reach for power and then make the most of their conquest . . . To the extent that they are permitted to fashion the curriculum and the procedures of the school they will definitely and positively influence the social attitudes, ideals, and behavior of the coming generation. (p. 26)

Today's educators shape tomorrow's education. As educator intellectuals on diverse platforms, we should harness our energies to move messages of social justice forward, to integrate exploration into curriculum reform and elevate both social-emotional and academic learning standards.

I would align myself with Michael Apple (2013) also, in that education alone will not be the markers of a socially responsible society, but instead, *decentered unities* are required:

> Spaces that are crucial for educational and larger social transformation that enables progressive movements to find common ground and where joint struggles can be engaged and in that do not subsume each group under the leadership of only one understanding of how exploitation and domination operate in daily life. (p. 13)

Within these spaces of education, social action can be explored, questioned, and acted upon by honoring all perspectives; this is where the schoolhouse either crumbles or where it can be reimagined to extend beyond the four walls of an alma mater.

The significance in giving a voice to these female educator intellectuals who have enacted social change in the world is to demonstrate that women have a stake in social change. By examining their lived experiences, their narratives are pivotal to the education field and the social sciences in that their experiences have the potential to develop self-awareness in others, an awareness regarding injustices that exist in the world, and the

power of agency (Bruner, 2002; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Michelson, 2012; Miller, 1990). The lived experiences mined from their narratives could have a causal reaction on others, resulting in reciprocal social action (Bandura, 1995).

The intent of this work was to highlight that women can be instrumental in resisting hegemony and oppression by virtue of standing in their own power—even in places where it is not common for women to do so (Ali et al., 2000; Mohanty, 2003). I believe this understanding could lead to further fractures in the barriers of class, race, and gender (Freire, 2000; Naples & Desai, 2002; Rothenberg, 2004). I feel this study affirms that as female educators, we can create a sense of collective agency and give others the confidence needed to truly make a difference in the world.

As previously mentioned, through discourse and studies such as this, a conversation can continue to flourish, exposing new ways to give back to the world and reframe how we see ourselves in the equation. These narratives can be the conduit for which we elevate the education field and the social sciences by exposing the experiences of others, the lessons learned, and the journey each has undergone during their transformation. We *can* make a difference. What we all do matters (Arendt, 1968; Boyd, 1991; Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Miller, 1990).

Considering the Research

Synthesizing this data yielded realizations in the limitations of the research and recommendations for future study. As it turns out, my personal awareness of the world and my self-awareness grew exponentially by way of searching for the transformation in others. Parameters of the study are worth analyzing to inform next steps of discovery, nonetheless.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study revolve around the homogeniality of race of all six female educators. This study accomplished providing a sound foundation for exhuming the transformative experiences of six, female, educator intellectuals engaged in social change around the world. However, critical elements of those experiences related to gender, culture, power, social dominance, identity, situationality, positionality, self-efficacy, agency, and praxis were likely married to being White females and their American or Australian nationality. As most participants expressed, being White and American or Australian influenced the way they were received as the Other in the culture and community they served. In those cases, participants were given the authority to speak on behalf of local women in the communities they worked and were often afforded a heightened level of respect based on a) their race; and b) the assumption by virtue of their nationality that they were more educated than the local people they collaborated with while working.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future work would be to examine the transformative experiences of female educators of color engaging in social change around the world. The juxtaposition of aligning the data of the White participants of this study with women of color may offer further insight to the complexities of culture, power, and transformation. Through a critical feminist lens, new revelations may result that are different from the experiences of the women of this study. By further examining the transformative experiences of female educators of color as a catalyst for social change, the constructs of identity, world perceptions, hegemony, culture, power, and transnational feminine theory

would likely be realized differently based on race, historicity, and the context of their work.

Conclusions and Personal Journey

Many intervals in the research process offered me opportunities to reflect not only on the study itself but also on the expression of writing, learning, and life perspective. At times, I had mixed feelings with the urge to create mere memoires of the female educators' social action endeavors—they were exciting at times, adventurous, and always profoundly reflective. However, I knew it was important to remain grounded in the research questions and redirect my inquiry in a way that continued to draw from critical and feminist theory. The women's narratives alone would have been futile without deep seeded roots linking back to the various essential cornerstones I had explored in the literature, such as gender, social dominance, culture, power, habitus, and identity, for instance. In moments such as these, I found comfort in knowing the *best* story I could tell—the only narrative I could tell—was their truth. Caught between analysis and emotion at times, I stayed the course to be the reflexive researcher I aspired to be at the start of my study.

While coding the data and isolating the emergent and anticipated themes. I worried at times that I would succumb to the voluminous transcripts, field notes, memos, and audio recordings; rendering myself lost in the shear number of words and meaning structures. However, I found that the more I listened, read, and reflected, the data moved beyond facts and figures. The information became a part of me, and I was able to simultaneously intuit and analyze each shared experience both with a personal lens and a researcher lens. I feel this enabled me to develop a reflexive, hermeneutic review of the

literature and the female educators' experiences (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Green et al., 2006; Short, 1991; Van Manen, 1990).

Through the portraits in Chapter Four and the findings in Chapter Five, my aim was to build the aforementioned space for the readers to interact with the assertions I had set forth enabling them to draw their own conclusions, as related to their lived experiences. Hopefully, my study will stimulate thought and provoke conversation *with* the text, encouraging the readers to think about the significance of social inquiry, the human condition, and how the two can be resuscitated in education, academia, and society.

It came with ease for me to identify with the women and the Otherness they experienced during their social change work. Thinking back on my experiences as a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand, my various roles as an educator in the United States, and coming to terms with being a gay woman in the education field, I have my own sense of being the Other. However, it would be foolish to believe I could know the innermost ringing of their thoughts, their wonderings, and their conflicts with self and the world around them. My research dug into the heart of how the women perceived themselves, the world, and the impact social change engagement had on transformation. However, just as Mohanty's (2003) work on transnational feminism often warned, each woman's experience was distinct, unique, and separate. This was my compass throughout (a self-assumed vow, if you will) to offer, analyze, and share six distinct narratives. Perhaps, rivers flowing in the same direction, yet none of them able to comingle into a single confluence. This, I am proud of . . . the raw, the real, the intimate, and honest portraits

that emerged from sharing the lives of six female educator intellectuals working toward social justice in separate corners of the world.

Summarizing the work of this study is bitter sweet. Over the past five and a half years, I have been contemplating, planning, and researching in preparation for this qualitative study. I began by examining poverty and race relations here within the United States. However, as time passed, I found myself gravitating more toward *action*, the doing. The concept of agency and the possibility of creating social change drew me in. My curiosities were peaked by my early days in the Peace Corps and in the classroom, of course. Acknowledging my own transformation as a result of my travels, my work as a teacher and administrator, and by engagement in social action, I wondered how other female educators internalized their experiences and if they too, were transformed as a result.

In coming to know the participants of my research—Mariel, Jillian, Jennifer, Madison, Melinda, and Linda—I have come to know myself better. I was confounded at times by the very same questions I posed to them, trying to find the words that might fill out my own narrative if the questions were ever posed to me. For instance, my most pivotal social action endeavor has been my time in Thailand. As many of the participants shared, I am not sure if my contributions there were any more valuable than the internal rewards and transformation I underwent. I did not anticipate that all of the participants would feel the same way I felt, however. Although I collaborated with teachers to implement engaged instruction, educated people on AIDS and HIV, teamed with nonprofit organizations and the Thai Embassy, I recognized that I probably learned far more from the Thais than they could have ever learned from me.

I came to understand American abundance and recognized the luxuries I could live without—such as a closet full of shoes and clothes. The supreme peace of mind that came with access to clean drinking water and reliable health care were all lessons I learned. My inner-conflict teetered between being viewed as a *rich American* when I was drowning in student loan debt and the reality that I probably *was* in many ways richer than most Thais when it came to having had a life full of advantages. These advantages ranged from a free public education, three meals a day, and a home with electricity and running water in a democratic society that afforded me equal rights under the laws and opportunities to pursue passions and hobbies.

By coming to know the women of my study and learning about their social action work, I became reacquainted with myself. I discovered that by hearing about their experiences, my own social action was brought back to life. They ignited in me a spirit of transformation that rekindled a desire to roll up my sleeves and become part of the work once again. I am now deciding what my *new* agency will look like, what I might do, and who I might become—certain only that I must always be on a path of learning to better understanding the role I play in the larger context of the world.

I do feel a sense of longing for the women I came to know so closely through this research. I wonder about them and what they are doing from day to day. So intricately their lives have become part of my own lived experience that I feel the urge to reconnect with them. Wondering about the ongoing transformation that will continue to fluctuate during the course of their lives, I am occupied by the prospect of what they might accomplish in my absence and intrigued by how that might change them yet again. Perhaps, this too could be a follow up study. A longitudinal study giving me the

opportunity to be reacquainted with the six, female, educator intellectuals I will likely never forget.

It is easy to read about theory and study social injustices in the world. It is quite another thing to be moved to act. I aspire to continue to understand what provokes an individual to be an agent of change and how those experiences alter how they see themselves and the world around them. As I continue on my path as an educator, I hope I am always the learner and never the sage.

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Appendix A

IRRB Approval

NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY
1886
ACCESS. INNOVATION. EXCELLENCE.

Office of the Provost
122 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60603-6162

www.nl.edu
P/F 312.261.3729

November 17, 2014

April D. Jordan
2032 Darrow Avenue
Evanston , IL 60201

Dear Ms. Jordan:

The Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB) has received your application for your research study "The Transformative Experiences of Female Educators as a Catalyst for Social Change in the World". IRRB has noted that your application is complete and that your study has been approved by your primary advisor and an IRRB representative. Your application has been filed as Expedited in the Office of the Provost.

Please note that the approval for your study is for one year, from 14-Nov-2014 to 14-Nov-2015. At the end of that year, please inform the IRRB in writing of the status of the study (i.e. complete, continuing). During this time, if your study changes in ways that impact human participants differently or more significantly than indicated in the current application, please submit a Change of Research Study form to the IRRB, which may be found on NLU's IRRB website.

All good wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Sincerely,

Shaunti Knauth

Shaunti Knauth, Ph.D.
Chair, IRRB

Appendix B

IRRB Approval Renewal/Extension

NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY
1886
ACCESS. INNOVATION. EXCELLENCE.

Office of the Provost
122 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60603-6162

www.nl.edu
P/F 312.261.3729

November 16, 2015

April D. Jordan
2032 Darrow Avenue
Evanston , IL 60201

Dear Ms. Jordan:

The Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB) has received your application for renewal of your research study "The Transformative Experiences of Female Educators as a Catalyst for Social Change in the World". The renewal is approved.

Please note that the approval for your study is for one year, from 16-Nov-2015 to 16-Nov-2016. At the end of that year, please inform the IRRB in writing of the status of the study (i.e. complete, continuing). During this time, if your study changes in ways that impact human participants differently or more significantly than indicated in the current application, please submit a Change of Research Study form to the IRRB, which may be found on NLU's IRRB website.

All good wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Sincerely,

Shaunti Knauth

Shaunti Knauth, Ph.D.
Chair, IRRB

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Dear Prospective Participant:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study exploring female *educators* and social change, conducted by April D. Jordan, a doctoral student at National Louis University. The purpose of the study is to examine your lived experiences while engaging in social action in the world and its impact on your worldviews, self, and change. Specifically, the research questions that guide my study are:

1. How do female educators, as intellectuals, enact social change in the world?
2. How can the lived experiences of these women transform their perceptions of self and their worldviews, as a result of engaging in social action?
3. From the *Connectivity of Transformative Conditions'* perspective, how does transformation occur in these women's lives?

With your consent, you will be interviewed three times for about 60 minutes, with a possible fourth follow-up interview lasting 30-60 minutes. Upon request, you will receive a copy of your transcribed interviews at which time you may clarify information.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Only the researcher (myself) will have access to all transcripts, audio recordings, and field notes from the interviews. Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. While you most likely will not have any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute to a better understanding of the long-term impact of educators enacting social change in the world and its transformative nature.

You have the option of complete anonymity regarding the information gathered in this study pertaining to your name, the names of others, and any organizational/institutional affiliation you mention during our interviews, or you may choose to disclose such information.

Please select what you are most comfortable with regarding the study:

_____ I understand the information in this letter and agree to complete anonymity.

_____ I understand the information in this letter and agree that my name, names of others, and my affiliate organization/institution might be mentioned in the final dissertation narrative.

Please share your Skype name so we can connect for interviews: _____.

For your records, I can be reached at **apriljordan23 on Skype.**

In the event you have questions or require additional information, you may contact the researcher, April D. Jordan at:

2032 Darrow Ave.
Evanston, IL, 60201
U.S.A

Phone: (815) 351-1370
Email: ajordan6@nl.edu.

_____

Participant's Name (PRINT)

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_April D. Jordan_____

Researcher's Name (PRINT)

_____ __1-24-2015_____

Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix D

Interview Guide Questions

1. Tell me about your upbringing and how you identified/perceived yourself in the world as a girl?
    a. Please share a little bit about your upbringing, culture, and where you are from?
2. How did you view the world as a child?
3. What does it mean to you to be an educator? How do you see yourself as an educator?
4. What does social action mean to you? How do you see yourself as a change agent?
5. What brought you to where you are today in terms of social action engagement?
    a. Was there anything in your upbringing that might have inspired you to engage in social action? If so, what was it?
    b. What led you to your efforts in terms of seeking social change in general?
    c. What is your current occupation?
6. What were your expectations before becoming involved in your specific social action engagement (i.e., responsibilities, culture, and the people you worked with)?
7. Do you think that you have changed as a result of your engagement in social action? If so, then how?
    a. What have you discovered about yourself that you did not know before the engagement? Epiphanies? Key moments?

8. How did you set your goals and were they met?
    a. How did collaboration with those whom you were working to assist play out in your work?
    b. Do you think that these actions had an impact on the marginalized individuals you worked with? If so, then how?
9. As a woman navigating this social change situation in _____ (location/organization), how did others receive your efforts?
    a. How has working in _____ (year, i.e., 1983) impacted your efforts?
    b. How has working in_____ (geographical location, i.e., Afghanistan) impacted your efforts?
    c. What role did the culture of your work environment play in your experience?
    d. How did the people *see* you?
10. How do you identify/see yourself in the world now as an adult woman?
11. How do you view the world now as a woman?
12. Ten years from now, what will be said about you and your work?
13. What thoughts are you left with or what questions do you wish I had asked?

Appendix E

Follow-Up Thoughts

Please feel free to share any thoughts that may have come to you after our interview. I appreciate your time!